

Renovations slated for nature center

By CHRISTINE MORAN

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NEW BRITAIN TWP. — Structural damage has rendered the solar facility at the Peace Valley Nature Center unusable — but not for much longer.

On Saturday, at its 29th annual meeting, the Friends of the Peace Valley Nature Center Board officially kicked off a project to renovate the 20-year-old solar facility, which hasn't been open in years, and upgrade it with the latest in solar technology.

The solar facility aims to change the way visitors think about energy choices and their impact on the environment.

What better way to do this than to offer hands-on experiences, said Corey Jarin of the nature center.

"We want people to observe, do, think, hear, see, touch everything. Not just read it in a book," Jarin said.

Such was the thinking behind the energy bicycle, which will debut with the opening of the renovated facility. Visitors will be able to pedal the bicycle to see if they can produce enough energy to get a television running.

"It's a good way for them to understand how much energy is needed to run things that maybe they take for granted," said Scott Kelly with Re: Vision Architecture in Philadelphia, the architectural firm working on the project.

There are other interesting things planned for the renovated facility, including a composting toilet, a waterless urinal and a pond run by solar energy.

Work is expected to begin on the project this summer and finish by the fall.

It should cost somewhere around \$300,000; about \$50,000 has been collected so far, said Cindy Long, who is in charge of fund raising. The \$300,000 includes the cost of equipping the facility with educational displays.

Last year, more than 117,000 people visited the nature center; about 15,000 of those were students.

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