Aquarium to open Saturday at Greater Baton Rouge Zoo

By DEANN SMITH
Advocate staff writer

Park Superintendent Gene Young announced Tuesday that the new aquarium at the Greater Baton Rouge Zoo will open Saturday.

"I think it's a jewel in our zoo," he said during the monthly board meeting of the East Baton Rouge Parish Recreation and Park Commission.

Young said a lot of hard work went into what is being called L'Aquarium de Louisiane.

"It's not the Aquarium of the Americas, but it's a good aquarium," Young said, referring to New Orleans' aquarium.

The 3,500-square-foot aquarium will open to the public when the zoo opens its doors at 9:30 a.m. Saturday. The zoo admission charge will include the aquarium, Zoo Director Phil Frost said.

The aquarium will have 60 exhibits with 400 specimens from 100 species, Frost said. Fish, snakes, amphibians and turtles are all part of the exhibit, and all were gathered from Louisiana's waters, he said.

"All are native to Louisiana," he said. "It will be a fun place just because of the local flavor that goes with it."

He said he is excited because it will allow the public to see exotic-looking creatures actually reside in Louisiana's streams, bayous and saltwater marshes.

"Actually some of these are things that live in the streams behind our houses," he said. "We've got some of the most beautiful fish in the world right here in Louisiana."

Initially, the aquarium was going to feature just freshwater aquariums, but BREC decided to add saltwater tanks to ensure Louisiana's aquatic life is accurately depicted, Young said. Some of the freshwater tanks were acquired when Paradise Pets closed several years ago.

The total cost for the aquarium was $415,000, which includes constructing the building and providing the equipment for the exhibits and life-support systems for the specimens, Young said. The aquarium is the first piece of the planned Atchafalaya Basin exhibit, which will have Acadian-style buildings.

Also Tuesday, the commissioners met for 15 minutes behind closed doors to discuss litigation involving the expropriation of 25 acres in the Stevendale area near Hamilton Avenue for a neighborhood park. The commission then reconvened in open session to vote unanimously to offer a settlement to C&S Development Inc., the owner of the land, before a May 6 court date.

Attorney Bill Roberts, who represents BREC, declined to say how much BREC will offer the company.

And, the board authorized the creation of a public information officer position for BREC to handle media inquiries and public relations for the agency. Young said it's still being determined whether it will be a full-time, part-time or contract position, and he said the salary range has not been determined.