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From: Dawn Dawson
Sent: Thursday, December 3, 2015 11:59:12 AM (UTC-05:00) Eastern Time (US & Canada)
To: Dawn Dawson
Subject: Officials Break Ground for New State Welcome Center on I-77

For Immediate Release – Dec. 3, 2015
Contact – Dawn Dawson-House, ddawson@scprt.com, 803-467-0202

Officials Break Ground for New State Welcome Center

Fort Mill -- The South Carolina Department of Parks, Recreation & Tourism broke ground today for a new official state welcome center off Interstate 77 southbound in Fort Mill. The agency will replace the existing 34-year-old facility at this location with a 10,000-square-foot, modern building with significant customer service upgrades.

The \$4 million center is expected to open next fall. It was designed by Charleston-based Liollo Architecture and will be built by JM Cope Construction of Rock Hill. It is the first of two welcome center “total rebuilds” scheduled in South Carolina for 2016. The other is located on I-95 northbound near Hardeeville.

South Carolina’s welcome centers are on the major interstates at the state’s borders, at Santee on I-95 and on U.S. 17 in Little River. They were built across the state in the late 1960s to early 1980s to serve a growing traveling public. They contribute to the state’s \$18 billion tourism economy through travel assistance, itinerary building and other support.

SCPR Director Duane Parrish calls the welcome centers South Carolina’s front porch, where we welcome our guests, saying these facilities must keep up with evolving traveler needs and expectations. “Our centers look the same today as they did 30 or 40 years ago, from the buildings’ interior designs, furnishings and fixtures, to the exterior look and feel,” Parrish said. “While these centers have remained mostly the same, everything else has continued to evolve ... from architectural, interior and ergonomic design to advancements in communication technology and even the very nature of how and why we travel,” he said. “We felt this was something that, with increasing urgency, needed to be addressed in order for these centers to effectively fulfill their core mission and purpose.”

The South Carolina Welcome Centers provide travel assistance and encourage visitors to stay longer and spend more while they are in the state.

Nearly 1 million visitors use the Fort Mill welcome center every year and the staff’s assistance generates an estimated \$239,000 economic impact.

Among the customer service improvements planned in the new center are:

- Self-serve kiosks with travel information
- A digital guestbook
- Monitors that broadcast real-time weather updates and road conditions
- Tablets that will be used by staff to further assist travelers with access to information
- A more open, customer-friendly lobby
- A Family Care Area for guests who need a comfortable and private place for breastfeeding and other medical

needs

A vending area located inside a lighted night entrance

As an added measure of beauty and significance, the exterior brickwork of the new center will feature three distinct layers of color to mimic the soil samples taken from the center's grounds and also seen in local Catawba Pottery.

"Like any front porch, it is important that our centers make each and every visitor feel welcome and glad they chose South Carolina as their travel destination," Parrish said.

For more information on the new state welcome center on I-77, contact Dawn Dawson-House at ddawson@scprt.com or 803-734-1779.

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SAVE THE DATE: Mark your calendar for February 15 – 17, 2016 for the 2016 Governor's Conference on Tourism & Travel. Please visit www.scgovcon.com for more information.



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