



Bay Area News Group file

Environmental Volunteers Executive Director Allan Berkowitz at the groundbreaking for the Eco Center in Palo Alto in 2008. The project has saved the building, but inside work is waiting on new funding.

PALO ALTO

Sea Scout Base project slowed by money woes

BY WILL OREMUS
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A Palo Alto nonprofit's renovation of the Sea Scout Base in the Palo Alto Baylands has run aground in economic shoals.

Environmental Volunteers, which teaches youths about nature, has successfully restored the boat-shaped building's exterior and placed it on a new foundation, so it no longer floods at high tide. But the organization's plan to move into the building and host classes there is on hold as it looks for money to fix up the interior.

"The excitement for us is that we have succeeded at saving and preserving the building," said Allan Berkowitz, executive director. "There's also disappointment that, because of the economy, fundraising has been affected, and we have to take a break from active construction."

"However," he continued, "we fully expect to complete the project. It will simply take a little bit longer."

Built in 1941 as a base for the local Sea Scout program, the building fell into disuse after the Palo Alto Yacht Harbor closed and the Sea Scouts moved to Redwood City. It was rotting and slowly sinking into the marsh when the Environmental Volunteers began their \$3.2 million renovation last fall.

At the time, there was concern that the breeding season of an endangered bird, the California Clapper Rail, could force delays. Instead, construction went relatively smoothly, but fundraising dried up about \$900,000 short of the goal, Berkowitz said.

With the building now secured from the elements but bare inside, Environmental Volunteers has shifted its fundraising focus to keeping the organization afloat, he added. A drop in donations has forced some cuts, but Berkowitz said there's enough in reserve to ride out the storm.

It's unclear how long the project will be delayed. Berkowitz said the group would welcome a major donor who could get it going again. He estimated the remainder of the work — interior renovations, new porches and landscaping — would take about four months. When it's finished, the nonprofit's administrative offices will occupy one wing and a second-story loft, while the two-story main room and the third-story observation bridge will be used for exhibits, events and birdwatching.

For more information or to donate to the project, call Environmental Volunteers at 650-961-0545 or visit www.evols.org.

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