



FOR RELEASE: IMMEDIATE

June 14, 2007

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**Ribbon Cut at Albany Pine Bush Discovery Center;
New Building Will be Center for Environmental Learning**

*Ceremony hosted by NYS Parks and Environmental Commissioners
Project made possible with a \$1 million donation from Trustco Bank*

Albany, N.Y. –The Albany Pine Bush Preserve celebrated the grand opening of its Discovery Center this morning with a ribbon cutting ceremony led by Carol Ash, Commissioner of the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation. Joining the Commissioner in this day-long celebration were members of the Albany Pine Bush Preserve Commission, teachers, students and other supporters.

The Discovery Center is an interactive, hands-on environmental education facility for students and families of the Capital Region and beyond. It transforms the globally unique Preserve into an exciting adventure where learning comes naturally.

“The programs and facilities at the Discovery Center will advance our mission to preserve and manage the Pine Bush while at the same time providing substantial public benefit,” Commissioner Ash said. “As the gateway to the Pine Bush, the Discovery Center introduces visitors to everything that makes the Preserve rare and adventurous. Visitors can touch a snake skin, make a sand dune, plan a prescribed fire, learn how to help the environment and much more. This Center will promote exciting, memorable experiences with interactive exhibits, universally accessible trails, interpretive programs, education resources, demonstration gardens, and opportunities for hands-on involvement in our wildlife habitat restoration work,” the commissioner said.

Funding for the \$3.1 million Discovery Center has come primarily through the New York State Environmental Protection Fund, including a \$1.5 million municipal parks grant and \$350,000 in grants through the Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation (OPRHP). The Nature Conservancy aided in raising nearly \$400,000 toward construction of the center from private foundations and individuals. A \$1 million donation from Trustco Bank has been contributed to an endowment to support long-term operation at the Center. Having achieved \$1.4 million for the endowment, the Center aims to ultimately raise \$3.1 million which will be pursued through additional corporate and individual sources.

The Discovery Center is housed in the former State Employees Federal Credit Union headquarters (SEFCU) which relocated its offices to the Harriman Office campus in a land swap with the State of New York, which owns the building. The site is an adaptive reuse of a commercial building, with a large percentage of the interior demolition materials recycled or reused.

An essential goal of the project is to receive a silver Leadership in Energy and Environmental (LEED) certification from the U.S. Green Building Council. LEED is the nationally accepted benchmark for the design, construction, and operation of high performance green buildings. LEED promotes a whole-building approach to sustainability by recognizing performance in five key areas of human and environmental health: sustainable site development, water savings, energy efficiency, materials selection, and indoor environmental quality.

The 3,010-acre Albany Pine Bush Preserve receives nearly 100,000 visits annually, including more than 3,000 students. Although the Preserve hosts 9 trailheads with 20 miles of official trails, and provides numerous outreach programs throughout the year, there was previously no central location for people to begin their visit. The Discovery Center will serve as a front door to the Preserve, enhancing the quality of life in the Capital Region by providing facilities to meet the needs of thousands of visitors of all ages. It will be a central location for visitors to learn about the unique and fascinating ecology and rich cultural history of this local natural treasure and a place for visitor orientation, discovery based programs, trail information and other services.

“The Pine Bush Discovery Center is an excellent asset to the Capital Region for the promotion of environmental education and stewardship,” said NYSDEC Commissioner Pete Grannis. “It’s thanks to the collaborative efforts of the Albany Pine Bush Preserve Commission that this new Discovery Center will only enhance the Preserve by offering the public even more educational and recreational opportunities. The Center allows new opportunities for public involvement in conservation projects,

along with the chance to experience interactive exhibits, accessible trails, gardens, and an array of educational materials. This exciting addition to the Pine Bush Preserve will afford local residents and visitors with unique opportunities to be hands on in learning more about the state's unique natural resources and the immense benefits they have in our everyday life.”

Senator Neil Breslin added: "The Discovery Center will be an exciting introduction to this very unique preserve. Visitors will begin their journey through the Pine Bush in a state of the art welcoming center. I look forward to bringing my grandchildren to this gateway into the preserve and helping them to learn about this fascinating ecology."

Assembly Majority Leader Ron Canestrari said: “The people of the Capital Region are truly fortunate that the Albany Pine Bush Discovery Center is opening to the public, with numerous opportunities for students and family-friendly programs. I’m delighted to have been able to work with my fellow members of the New York State Assembly to provide key support to bring this to all of our constituents.”

Assemblyman John McEneny added: “Getting there is said to be half the fun, but in this case it was a lot of work. Our Discovery Center is finished and ready to serve the entire unique ecosystem of the Albany Pine Bush. This ecosystem is less endangered year by year thanks to the efforts of a lot of people from State Parks to the Pine Bush Preserve and the Nature Conservancy with the constant dedication of Save the Pine Bush.

Assemblyman Bob Reilly said: "The Discovery Center is just that – a place to discover – to discover the treasures of the Pine Bush. And again we see that the partnership of many leads to success."

“The Discovery Center is a magnificent gateway to the Pine Bush for welcoming visitors and as a learning center for environmental education and awareness,” said Albany County Executive Mike Breslin.”

City of Albany Mayor Gerald Jennings said: “The Pine Bush is a treasured and popular destination for our residents and visitors, and this new center will enhance the existing programs and services by providing hands-on learning experiences for students, teachers, and other visitors to the preserve. I thank Chris Hawver and Michael Venuti for their commitment to this ecological resource.”

Mary Brizzell, Colonie Town Supervisor, added: "The opening of the Discovery Center is a wonderful addition to the Albany Pine Bush Preserve. The educational opportunities it offers will enhance the goals of the Commission, and that it is a "Green" building exemplifies the environmental stewardship of the Preserve."

Ken Runion, Town of Guilderland Supervisor said: "The Discovery Center will provide a central destination and an interactive environmental education center for the Pine Bush Preserve. This is a real enhancement for the Preserve, and the fact that the project was funded through a working public-private sector collaboration makes the achievement even more significant."

Henry Tepper, New York State Director of The Nature Conservancy, said: "The Discovery Center is a vital new destination and resource for the Capital District Region, serving as the home for enhanced environmental education and ecological stewardship programs for the Albany Pine Bush. We are grateful to our partners in the State of New York for providing significant funding for this project."

Katie Dolan, Eastern New York Chapter Director for The Nature Conservancy, added: "We hope the Discovery Center will introduce many Capital District residents to the unique ecosystems and species living in the heart of this increasing urbanized area. The Albany Pine Bush is a model for conservation in a world of increasing competition for space. We should all be proud of what is being accomplished here!"

Christopher A. Hawver, Albany Pine Bush Preserve Commission Executive Director, said: "The Albany Pine Bush Discovery Center has been in planning for more than 10 years. Our Discovery Center Director, Mike Venuti, has helped turn this exciting piece of the Commission's education and outreach plan into a much needed interpretive education center that will meet the needs of a growing number of Preserve visitors, and expand the awareness, appreciation and accessibility of the Albany Pine Bush Preserve. It will serve as a resource for schools and individuals in the Capital District Region and beyond. In the coming year we will continue to transform this former commercial site with native plant landscaping, demonstration gardens, a universally accessible Discovery Trail and outdoor exhibits. We hope our friends, neighbors and corporate sponsors will help us meet our remaining exhibit funding goal and build an endowment that will assist us in completing, maintaining and expanding this community resource for future generations."

Darwin Roosa, president of the newly formed, Friends of the Pine Bush Community said: "Friends is truly excited to be working with the staff of the Preserve Commission and Discovery Center to

support conservation, stewardship and educational goals within the Preserve. As a tax-exempt membership organization, we especially look forward to supporting many organized activities and programs that will help the public discover the wonders of the Albany Pine Bush at these outstanding Discovery Center facilities."

Located within the Capital District and encompassing portions of the towns of Colonie and Guilderland as well as the City of Albany, the Albany Pine Bush represents one of the best remaining examples of an inland pine barrens ecosystem, of which few remain in the world. This gently rolling sand plain is home to a unique variety of rare plants and animals, including the endangered Karner blue butterfly.

The Albany Pine Bush Preserve Commission was created by an act of the NY State Legislature in 1988 to protect and manage the unique and endangered natural communities and species of the Albany Pine Bush for ecological, recreational and educational benefits. The Commission consists of representatives of the Department of Environmental Conservation, the State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation, the City of Albany, Albany County, the towns of Colonie and Guilderland, The Nature Conservancy and four private citizen representatives who are appointed by the Governor.

The Albany Pine Bush Preserve is located at 195 New Karner Road in Albany.
For more information on the Albany Pine Bush Preserve and Discovery Center please visit www.albanypinebush.org

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