

EarthQuest brings doubts, concerns to EMC



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Amid some doubts and local concerns about the EarthQuest project coming to East Montgomery County, Frank McCrady, president of the East Montgomery County Improvement District, said that the project is still on schedule as planned.

"The park is still on track to open late 2012, early 2013 and we will break ground either at the end of this year or early 2011," McCrady said.

Recent articles and online polls suggest that some in the community have doubts about whether the park will actually happen. Some area residents say they have been "hearing" about this park for at least three years, but have yet to see any sign that progress is being made toward the park's opening.

"People will know exactly when we will start working on the park. We will have an official groundbreaking ceremony where the community, media and businesses will be welcome to come and join us for the first start of construction," McCrady said.

Area residents have expressed mixed feelings about the park and what it will mean to EMC. Some community members and businesses agree that even though there will be more traffic in the area, the growth to the community would bring positive changes.

"Traffic will definitely be a concern, and that is my main concern. Growth is always painful and change is hard, but over time I believe people will adjust, and if the EarthQuest team keeps their promotional promises, it will be very worth it," said Jacqueline Beck, a resident of Roman Forest.

McCrady agrees that with any community change comes concerns from residents, and there

are always growing pains with added projects like this to any community.

"Naturally, there will be more congestion; it is the nature of the area. Any additional growth will be good and bad to some in the community. We are still working with the city and state to relieve any burdens that come with the growth in the area," McCrady said.

Other community members agree that even with the additional traffic, the park located in the area itself will add a positive side to them personally.

"The positive thing it will bring to me personally is an increase in property value. I own land in the area, so the area growth would be of significant personal benefit. My wife would see an improvement in her business, as well, as a real estate agent. The real estate market will definitely increase," said Chuck Segrest, a New Caney resident.

Segrest said that he can understand the residents that are not excited about the growth to the community. He said that a lot of residents may have moved out to EMC to get away from the traffic that Houston has.

"I know of many individuals that are not really excited about the changes it will bring to the area. I personally don't want to retire in an area filled with hotels and restaurants as I would be looking for a slower pace and less traffic. I think many share my feelings," Segrest said.

Regardless of the additional traffic and congestion the park may bring to the area, McCrady said rumors that the park will require the removal of homes and/or current businesses is false.

"The EarthQuest model clearly shows where the park will be located. No homes or businesses will be removed or torn down by the park's addition to the community. All the land needed for the park is purchased and owned by the park. No additional land is needed," he said.

EarthQuest will be located in New Caney on Highway 59 across from Roman Forest Boulevard.

McCrady also stated that there was no problem with the financing of the project. The park is still being financed by companies, and business sponsorships are still being looked into.

The EarthQuest Institute Museum also continues to have fundraisers to raise money for the nonprofit museum that will be located inside the park.

"The recent museum fundraiser went well, and we had a good turnout. We are working on more fundraisers for future dates," said McCrady.

The EarthQuest Adventures theme park is estimated to cost \$389 million. The museum itself is estimated to cost approximately \$20 million. Because it is a nonprofit, its funding is completely separate from the park's.

For more information on the EarthQuest project, visit www.earthquestadventures.com.