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'Hi Y'all' Will Greet Travelers

BY MARJORIE MEGIVERN
There's a big southern welcome being prepared for travelers along U.S. 17 and Hwy. 130, with a North Carolina Welcome Center opening Labor Day at the intersection of those two highways on the new Shallotte bypass.

Expressing that welcome with exuberance and representing southeastern North Carolina will be Sabrina Hodges, new director of the Welcome Center.

Hodges was recently hired from the Southport-Oak Island Chamber of Commerce, where she served as executive vice-president and welcome center manager.

The Columbus County native is a 1987 graduate of the University of North Carolina at Wilmington in speech communications. She has also attended Southeastern Community College in Whiteville.

"My new job will be greeting the public and making them feel welcome in southeastern North Carolina," she said, "and promoting tourism in all of this area."

Lest Brunswick County be seen as monopolizing the promotion business, Hodges was quick to point out other counties she represents: New Hanover, Pender, Onslow, Craven, Bladen and Duplin are part of SENCland.

"My biggest responsibility is letting all these counties know the center is available to promote their area," Hodges said. "I'll be visiting them and getting their support."

Speaking of support, the \$1.2 million center was constructed with state money, but funding for maintenance, furnishings and salaries is being provided in part by Brunswick County, the Wilmington Chamber of Commerce and the Cape Fear Coastal Visitors Bureau. "We want others to give some support, too," Hodges noted.

The ground-breaking was held in October and the building was completed in early August, but a grand opening was scheduled for the last formal holiday of the year.

What visitors will see is a modernistic building with a steep A-frame, surrounded by parking areas and a good-sized picnic ground in back. Inside there is a reception area, an office and two storage rooms downstairs, with a spacious loft and additional storage upstairs.

The center staff includes, besides Hodges, two fulltime and one part-time information counselors, who will keep the facility open seven days a week, 8:30 a.m. till 5 p.m.

The new director moved in late summer from Southport to Shallotte with husband Darryle who is employed by Lowe's in Southport.

She spent most of the summer ordering brochures, selecting carpets, writing policies and interviewing staff. It was an exciting beginning to a new phase in Brunswick County's growth and service to visitors.

Welcome,
Y'all!



STAFF PHOTO BY MARJORIE MEGIVERN
SABRINA HODGES was eager for the completion and opening of the North Carolina Welcome Center, when she posed during its construction. She is the center's director.

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