

Beczak-on-the-Hudson

New Yonkers center offers programs on the river's environment

It's been more than two years in the making, but the Beczak Environmental Education Center's new, \$850,000 Hudson River Interpretive Center will open Saturday. It promises to be worth waiting for.

Beczak is Westchester County's only Hudson River waterfront environmental center and offers workshops on the ecological, cultural and historic aspects of the Hudson River estuary for the public. The center relocated from the old Naval Militia building on Alexander Street farther north to the former Habirshaw Athletic Club building, which has been undergoing renovations since 2001.

The new building will have a central atrium for displays and a river laboratory. Tours of the center's tidal marsh will be conducted Saturday, as well as a river cleanup. The center has a 300-gallon tank that demonstrates the river's tidal movement, the only tank of its kind open to the public.

Westchester County and Scenic Hudson, a Poughkeepsie-based environmental group, bought the Habirshaw site for \$850,000. The renovated building is a wel-

If you go

The new Beczak center will open at noon Saturday at 35 Alexander St., Yonkers. Regular hours are 9 a.m.-5 p.m. weekdays. For information, call 914-377-1900.

come new environment for a structure once used as a club for workers at the former Habirshaw Division of the Phelps Dodge Copper Products Corp. Yonkers kicked in \$300,000 for renovations, and a state grant for \$200,000 was awarded in 2001.

The center opened in 1988 and is named for Joseph Beczak, the late Hudson River enthusiast and environmentalist. Although the group has been conducting educational programs on the Hudson for more than 20 years, its formal, organized life has been much shorter.

The center's new building demonstrates how far the organization has come in recent years, especially from a glum period in 1993 when grants were drying up and a \$25,000 contribution from the City of Yonkers rescued the center from shutting down. Since then, the center's work has become more widely known and its value to Yonkers and Westchester has increased. The new interpretive center should enhance its value even more.