A long-awaited day has finally arrived for the New Jersey Audubon Society's Nature Center of Cape May. On Saturday, April 29, the award-winning environmental education facility will celebrate the grand opening of the Trucksesse Welcome Center.

What began as a summer program for 25 children operating out of a camper trailer 14 years ago has blossomed into a campus of five buildings connected by native meadows and theme gardens serving over 12,000 visitors annually.

The jewel of the campus, situated on the shores of beautiful Cape May Harbor, is the new Truckse Welcome Center, featuring a second-floor deck and three-story Cape Harbor Observation Tower with stunning views of the harbor.

Tours of the Trucksesse Welcome Center will take place 15 minutes before each hour throughout the afternoon. The welcome center sits on the site of an original home and lot owned by Bill and Janice Trucksesse and preserved through a Green Acres grant in 1992.

Members of the Trucksesse family were major donors to the welcome center's capital campaign.

The grand opening festivities begin at noon with a Meadow Walk and tour of the campus grounds, led by Director Gretchen Ferrante.

The afternoon brings activities for all ages, including Creature Features with Guest Naturalists Travis Davis from Aquatic Discoveries, Steven Servatka, of New Jersey Nature, Dave Golden, of the NJ Endangered and Nongame Species Program, and Matt Pelligrine, from Cape May Point State Park.

Lillian Armstrong, NJAS director of the Birder and Wildlife Trails of the Bayshore Region Project, will speak at 1 p.m. NCCM staff will also lead Harbor Safaris, Habitat Hunts, and birding walks throughout the day.

An Artisan's Walk, featuring fine arts and crafts vendors, an art exhibit by the Aquarian Project, live music from the Cape May County String Band and Guitarist Wesley Ochs, children's games, kayaking demonstrations, a spring plant sale, and delicious foods round out the day.

At 4 p.m., the Center for Community Arts will host an opening reception for the exhibit "Natural Expressions — An Exhibit of Artworks from CCA's Classes for Adults."

CCA and Nature Center volunteers will also offer free interactive art activities for all ages throughout the afternoon in the Education Hall (formerly NCCM's main administrative building and gift shop).

The day will culminate with a ribbon-cutting ceremony at 5 p.m., followed by a Sunset Social on the Cape Harbor Observation Deck.

The Haskin Shellfish Research Laboratory and Rutgers Institute of Marine and Coastal Sciences, in conjunction with Cumberland County Community College, is hosting an open house from noon to 5 p.m.

Located next door to the Nature Center campus, the facility invites visitors to come learn about ongoing research programs in marine fisheries, aquaculture, and marine science.

The Nature Center of Cape May is located at 1600 Delaware Avenue. Call 609-898-8848, or email nccm@njaudubon.org for a complete schedule of events for the day. In case of rain, all grand opening activities will take place Sunday, April 30.