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# Citizen's group begins work to restore structures at Koreshan historic site

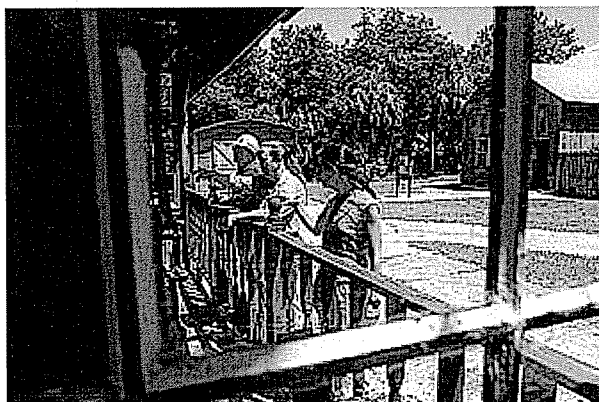
Wednesday, August 25, 1999

By ERINN HUTKIN, Staff Writer

When Ephrat Yovel, a park planner with the state Department of Environmental Protection, asked resident Bill Grace what should be improved at Koreshan State Historic Site, Grace told her she was standing in it.

As one of about two dozen people gathered in the site's Arts Hall on Tuesday night to discuss how to better the land, Grace said the park should give top priority to restoring its 13 decaying historic structures.

"The state's owned this park for 40 years, and very little has been done toward the preservation of historic buildings," said Grace, president of a citizen's group devoted to preserving the site. "Everything's kept neat and clean, but we're not prepared for a hurricane. I think it's way past time the state got serious about



Park officials Ephrat Yovel of park planning, from left, Jeanne Parks, the Koreshan State Park manager, and Jeanne Marie Warzeski, a resource management consultant, take a tour of the facilities at the Koreshan State Historic Site before Tuesday night's meeting for public comment on park improvements. A draft proposal will be ready in about nine months, with a chance for additional public comment before it is approved. David Carson/Staff

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funding these buildings."

Citizens were invited to Estero's 156-acre historic site Tuesday to suggest improvements as park officials draft the Koreshan site's unit management plan. Such plans are required from state parks every five years.

The final document will be submitted to Gov. Jeb Bush for approval in about nine months, said Park Manager Jeanne Parks. The plan essentially describes what Parks is expected and allowed to do in the next five years.

Parks, who was joined Tuesday by Yovel and DEP resource management specialist Jeanne-Marie Warzeski, explained that the plan will serve as a blueprint for five years, outlining what's feasible in funding and construction.

But as far as Tuesday's crowd was concerned, restoring the park's buildings is of utmost importance.

"If we lose these buildings, it's all over," said Estero resident Ross MacDonald. "We can always expand, but you can't always save the buildings."

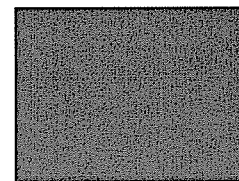
While the park has a regular budget and citizens' groups that work on obtaining grants, Yovel said the best way to secure the amount of money needed for restoration is through a special line item, which usually happens when citizens press their senators and senators press the governor for a particular item.

While restoration rose high on the evening's wish list, more than one in attendance suggested adding hiking trails throughout the park and making the site handicapped accessible. Also proposed was a visitors' center where park-goers could watch videos or find written information about the site, which was founded in 1894 when the Koreshans began a utopian religious community on the banks of the Estero River.

Other residents, like Mimi Straub, had wishes that were a bit simpler. She told park officials there should be a soda machine and a shelter near the site's buildings to give hot, tired tourists a little relief.

"It's not a million dollars' worth, but it's a start and it will make people more comfortable," she said.

A draft of the plan will be presented during a second public meeting in about four months. Although the document will be built and revised by everyone from an advisory committee to the DEP, Parks said public input carries weight.



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"(The plan) is very much based on what the public wants," Parks said.



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