

# Foundation Phoenix Fund Offers Match to Benefit Bird Rehab

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Ocean Reef Foundation Administrator

The Ocean Reef Foundation has announced a major \$1.5 million fundraising effort to support the Florida Keys Wild Bird Center in Tavernier. The project is aptly named The Phoenix Fund, after the mythological bird which rose from its ashes, and was established and made possible by a \$750,000 matching challenge grant from the Gintel Family Foundation.

“The immediate goal is the purchase of the Tavernier sanctuary property where the Center is located. Taking it out of private hands and purchasing it in the Center’s name will free it of encumbering debt and ensure its preservation for the enjoyment of our community and visitors for years to come,” according to Foundation President John Taylor.

He notes, “The Gintel Family’s generous matching grant comes at a critical time, and we hope the challenge funds allow us to take advantage of the attention now focused on the Center’s criti-

cal role in the rehabilitation of birds affected by the oil spill. The disaster has galvanized interest and awareness of the vital importance of this facility – both in a crisis such as this and for the long term.”

FKWBC Co-Chairman & President Robert Gintel explains, “Our primary mission is to rescue, rehabilitate and release injured and displaced birds. We also provide humane shelter for birds which cannot be released. The Center stands ready to aid birds impacted by the oil spill.”

The new Phoenix Fund’s name refers to the fact that the Center was close to closing its doors in October of 2009, and would not have survived to meet this recent crisis were it not for an outpouring of charitable support from the community which afforded it an opportunity to “rise again.”

At that time, the Center was being run by 81-year-old founder Laura Quinn who had been forced to mortgage the property to keep it going. It was operating on “a wing and a prayer” after donations dropped steeply with the economic downturn. In debt and

disrepair, the Center’s ability to care for birds was jeopardized and the staff was faced with the possibility of closing and being required to euthanize the birds it couldn’t place elsewhere.

In the six months since the community came to its rescue, the Center has risen from the proverbial ashes in the tradition of the fabled Phoenix with a new leadership team, a new veterinary team and a clean, modern medical facility at mile marker 94. The gift shop, educational exhibit and daily 3:30 pm feeding remain at mile marker 93.6 bayside, and continue to draw some 17,000 eco-tourists and locals to enjoy, observe and photograph the resident flock each year.

Now that the operation is stabilized, the new board has developed a three phase program for a sustainable future. The Phoenix Fund was created

to achieve phases one and two; first to purchase and protect the land and next to upgrade and modernize the existing facilities. The third phase envisions the eventual creation of an endowment fund to support the Center and reduce dependency on charitable donations.

“If the Phoenix Fund meets its objectives,” Gintel elaborates, referring to plans already in the works, “We’ll raise \$1.5 million, purchase and preserve the property and be well on our way to renovating and staffing a wild bird rehabilitation facility that will be second to none.”

To make a donation and have it matched by the Gintel Family Foundation, please note “Phoenix Fund” in the memo line of your check sent to the Ocean Reef Foundation at 200 Anchor Drive, Key Largo, FL, 33037. For more information, please call 305-367-4707.

