Site Superintendent Mike Patterson leads a tour of the Cohen SoundWaters Harbor Center at Boccuzzi Park in Stamford on March 31. The new facility is designed to support SoundWaters’ Young Mariners, Harbor Corps and College Skills programs, with features including a research lab, job skills training workshop, classrooms for academic and sail training, and a safe waterfront with year-round access to Long Island Sound.

‘Bring the water back to Waterside’

SoundWaters project to create public access to Stamford Harbor

By Ignacio Laguarda

STAMFORD — A new state-of-the-art harbor education center is coming to Boccuzzi Park, but the building is only one piece of a project meant to create public access to Stamford Harbor and Long Island Sound. “Long Island Sound has one of the highest barriers to entry of any natural resource, I would argue, in the country,” said Leigh Shemitz, president of SoundWaters, the Stamford-based organization that focuses on protecting the Sound through advocacy and education. “To be able to actually get out on it and use it and be part of it ... you actually have to have a boat and have access and have skills.”

That’s where SoundWaters comes

See Center on A6

Above, an artist’s rendering of the new Cohen SoundWaters Harbor Center at Boccuzzi Park in Stamford. At left, construction continues on the facility on March 31.

Tyler Szemere / Hearst Connecticut Media
Construction continues on the Cohen SoundWaters Harbor Center at Bocceuzzi Park in Stamford on March 31. The new facility is designed to support SoundWaters’ Young Mariners, Harbor Corps and College Skills programs, with features including a research lab, job skills training workshop, classrooms for academic and sail training, and a safe waterfront with year-round access to Long Island Sound.

SoundWaters President Leigh Shemitz shows the waterfront view from the new Cohen SoundWaters Harbor Center at Bocceuzzi Park in Stamford.

from the early days of SoundWaters, which was created in the late 1980s in response to a series of articles in The Stamford Advocate about the deteriorating state of the harbor.

For about a decade, SoundWaters had a boat but no real place to call home. They were essentially a “ship and a shack,” as Shemitz described it.

In 2006, the organization finally found a home in the form of the historic Holly House on Cove Island where it still operates. The Cove location will remain, even when the new center officially opens, Shemitz said.

The new harbor center is funded partially through the state of Connecticut, which is spending $2 million on the structure, as well as the city of Stamford, which is contributing $1 million. The remaining cost of roughly $4 million is being raised through private sources, Shemitz said. There’s about $2 million to go in fundraising.

“It should be admirably a destination,” Shemitz said of the center, park and shoreline.

“If we do all our jobs really, really well in the city, the parking lot will end up being too small, because all of a sudden, people will want to come here.”