

VINS gets \$1.9 million grant to complete move

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By [Johanna Sorrentino](#) Southern Vermont Bureau
QUECHEE — The Vermont Institute of Natural Science is migrating this summer.

The nonprofit organization will move to its new location along the Ottauquechee River just east of Quechee Gorge this October, thanks to a \$1.9 million federal grant recently secured by Sen. James Jeffords, I-Vt.

The institute, best-known for its work rehabilitating wounded raptors, opened the original facility on Church Hill Road in Woodstock in 1972.

The first phase of the VINS Nature Center — featuring a series of raptor exhibits, an interpretive nature trail and nature shop — opened in Quechee in June of 2004.

Jason Drebitko, president and CEO of VINS, said this new round of grant money will work with private donations to bring all of the institute's programs together at the Quechee location.

The second phase of the project will see the construction of a 6,900-square-foot multipurpose building that is part of the environmental learning center. It will house a 50-seat classroom for educational programs and serve as the headquarters for all of VINS science, education and administrative staff.

Jeffords received the money through appropriations from the U.S. Department of Energy.

"For many years, VINS has devoted itself to performing cutting-edge research, rehabilitating wildlife, and providing Vermont's school children with the opportunity to study and explore nature," said Jeffords in a written statement.

He has worked on the relocation project for several years. "It's part of his environmental legacy. This environmental learning center is a testament to his work," Drebitko said.

The catalyst for the move was a lawsuit filed by Woodstock neighbors opposed to traffic in the late 1990s and the subsequent settlement, which stated VINS would move to a different location.

Drebitko said the new site will give them increased visibility. It will also boost revenue by increasing the number of exhibits and events taking place there.

Drebitko said he hopes the move and expansion will help highlight the other programs at the institute.

"The birds overshadow the other things we do, and we want to build more nonraptor exhibits," he said.

The institute's largest program, Environmental Learning for the Future, connects



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Workers from Justin Excavating of Lebanon, N.H., prepare a site for a new education center at the VINS headquarters in Quechee on Friday.

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elementary school children with nature. VINS scientists research trends in species other than birds, such as the migratory patterns of butterflies.

In June, VINS will introduce a new interactive exhibit called "Ribbit!" from the New England Aquarium, revealing the secret lives of frogs from New England and around the world.

Landscaping on the 47-acre campus, including new trails and outdoor kinetic sculptures, will also be ready in June. "Flight," an interactive exhibit about how birds and butterflies migrate, can be seen later this fall.