



Teyha, a brown black bear lounges on a platform at the Busch Wildlife Sanctuary in Jupiter on Sept. 16, 2022. The sanctuary is moving to a new, larger facility about five miles away. PHOTOS BY GREG LOVETT/THE PALM BEACH POST

# ‘It’s heartbreaking to leave ... My eyes are full of tears’

## After 40 years, Busch Wildlife relocates

**Kristina Webb**

Special to The Palm Beach Post

JUPITER – It’s been an emotional week for Amy Kight.

Busch Wildlife Sanctuary’s executive director has faced the bittersweet task of wrapping up work at the site that has been the sanctuary’s home in Jupiter for 40 years, before moving to a new, larger, state-of-the-art facility about five miles away.

“It’s kind of like, it’s your childhood home,” she said. “You’re so excited to move into this great new house that you’ve designed yourself. But then you



The new and bigger Busch Wildlife Sanctuary is being built on 19.4 acres in Jupiter on Sept. 16, 2022.

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# Busch Wildlife

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look at the little place that got you there and it's heartbreaking to leave it. My eyes are full of tears."

Saturday marked Busch Wildlife's final day open to the public on its long-time campus just west of Central Boulevard and south of Indiantown Road. While the sanctuary's hospital will still accept patients, guests will not be able to visit until Busch Wildlife reopens at its new 19.4-acre site at Rocky Pines and Indiantown roads.

The new facility will have a soft opening Oct. 9, with a grand opening celebration Oct. 14 that will feature food trucks, a face painter, fairy hair, book signings from local authors and animal encounters, Kight said.

"We just really want people to have fun, come out and celebrate the community that built this place," she said.

Busch Wildlife bought the Jupiter Farms property in November 2020 for \$1.6 million. The \$18 million sanctuary project includes an open-air amphitheater for educational programming with space for 160 people — twice the size of the current amphitheater.

That space will be named for local philanthropist Mary Alice Fortin, in honor of the \$1.25 million donation from her Fortin Foundation to the sanctuary in February.

The animal enclosures will be larger, and so will the hospital, which will have a new viewing window for visitors to watch as wildlife patients are examined.

There is a hurricane-safe building to house the sanctuary's large mammals during storms. And there is a larger picnic area with a playground that overlooks the fox enclosure.

While moving to the new facility is exciting, Kight said many great memories have been made at the current location. Some of the people in Busch Wildlife's junior naturalists program as children since have returned as adult volunteers and employees. They love to re-create some of their old photos, often holding the same animals they held when they were younger.

"This is a real part of their life," Kight said. "It's not just a snapshot in time. They're coming back to volunteer and they're lawyers, and they're veterinarians. Those memories are still there, but



**The Rev. Marty Zlatic blesses barred owl Oliver during a Blessing of the Animals service at Saint Joseph's Episcopal Church in Boynton Beach on Sept. 30, 2012. The owl, seen here with Busch official Rebeka Nikolaus, was attacked as a baby and is unable to fly, but has prevailed to be part of Busch's move to its new Jupiter Farms campus in October.**

BRUCE R. BENNETT/THE PALM BEACH POST

## If you go

**What's next?** New campus grand opening for Busch Wildlife Sanctuary

**Where:** 17855 Rocky Pines Road, Jupiter

**When:** 10 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Oct. 14

**Admission:** By donation

**Information:** [www.buschwildlife.org](http://www.buschwildlife.org), 561-575-3399

to know that that place won't be the same ..."

The longtime site's lease with the Loxahatchee River District states that the sanctuary must return the property to the way it was found in the mid-1990s, meaning every structure needs to be removed.

"There's this emotion that goes with everything you've built and having to remove it all," Kight said. "There's so many memories."

The move has been a long time com-

ing for the sanctuary, which has seen tremendous growth in the need for its hospital services in recent years. As the population has grown locally, Busch Wildlife is taking in more native critters hit by cars or attacked by pets.

The new facility, with its hospital that is four times the size of the current one, provides ample space for that care.

With the old site closed, work will begin to prepare and move the sanctuary's long-term residents, Kight said.

"The challenge really is heat, trying to move in summer with the animals," she said. Some of the larger animals will need to be anesthetized for their own safety, but some cannot regulate their body temperature while anesthetized, Kight said.

To help those animals, Busch Wildlife teams are working with local partners to make those moves in the early morning hours — 3 a.m., to be precise. "So we're mitigating those heat issues, and we're mitigating any traffic issues," Kight said.

Two local moving companies, Good

Greek Moving and Storage and Two Men and a Truck, are donating the use of their air-conditioned trucks to help with the move, she said.

"The community has come out, and they so want to be a part of it," Kight said. "Even though, I'm like, 'It's going to be 3 a.m., and it's a bear,'" she added, laughing. "They're all awesome."

One longtime resident making the move will be Oliver, a barred owl that came to Busch Wildlife in the mid-1990s. The staff was concerned their beloved "Ollie" wouldn't make it to the grand opening, so they took her to visit the new property when Busch Wildlife bought it in 2020, Kight said.

Despite ill health, Oliver beat the odds, made it through "a couple of spells where it was kind of touch and go" and now prepares to move as one of the sanctuary's oldest residents.

"This little lady has just soldiered on, and she has made it to this point," Kight said. "She has one eye and one wing and one bad kidney, and she's like, 'Damn it, I'm moving.'"