



By Randi Nissenbaum, Manatee County Reporter
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PARRISH --

Three months in, and construction crews are hard at work building the Fort Hamer Bridge.

Crews are laying the foundation and pilings to support the bridge, which will connect Fort Hamer Road, north of the Manatee River, and Upper Manatee River Road to the south.

"Right here this is going to be Pier 18," said Manatee County spokeswoman Trudy Gerena. "They have driven all of the permanent piles into the ground. We have also started on Pier 17, which is about 25 feet from the edge of the river."

When the Fort Hamer Bridge is complete, it will give area residents like Pat Rush a more direct route to major roadways.

"I think it would make things easier," said Rush. "I think it would elevate a lot of the problems with the new construction that is about to be built in the next five or six years."

The bridge will also bring more people into Parish, so Manatee County is building a 160-acre recreational area called Hidden Harbor Park.

"Including perimeter trails along the river, some sand volleyball courts, a proper restroom, parking and picnic pavilion area," said Charlier Hunsicker, the county's director of parks and natural resources.

Hidden Harbor Park will be right across from Fort Hamer Park and right next to the new Fort Hamer Bridge, giving the area a recreational opportunity it has never had before.

"I think it will probably make it look a little more like a community," said Kristen Reinisch, who lives nearby.

"Better for families like mine, where we have someplace to take the kids on weekends, to teach them appreciation for nature," Rush said.

While both projects are still in the beginning stages, it's safe to say in the year to come, this area will look much different.

The Fort Hamer Bridge is expected to be completed in 2016. Work on the Hidden Harbor Park is scheduled to take three years to complete.

The county owns about 2,000 acres in the area, and is planning on expanding the recreational area even more after the initial three years of work is completed.