

THE LONG WALK HOME



First section of Long Beach boardwalk to open today

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The first section of Long Beach's new \$44.2 million boardwalk will open this morning, city officials said yesterday.

Scores of residents clapped and cheered when City Manager Jack Schnirman announced that, beginning at 8:45 a.m., a four-block section between Long Beach and Magnolia boulevards will be available for public use.

"In the moments before the storm, it was my unpleasant job to be up here telling everybody to get out, to evacuate and to leave," Schnirman said. "I'm so happy to be able to be back here now today . . . saying the exact opposite: Come on back."

Ilene Schuss, 54, of Ocean-side, said she attended other post-Sandy milestone announcements and did not want to miss this one.

"After Sandy, there was a sense of hopelessness," she said, "and it's so nice to see the light at the end of the tunnel, a spark for the community."

Sen. Charles Schumer (D-N.Y.) told the crowd that the Federal Emergency Management Agency has agreed to pay a majority of the rebuilding costs. He added that his "last fight" with FEMA will be to get the agency to cover the additional costs needed to make the new boardwalk more durable.

"The leaders of Long Beach decided correctly to build the boardwalk, not the same as before, but better and stronger than before," Schumer said.

The new structure, made of Brazilian hardwoods and concrete, is expected to last 30 to 40 years, compared with the three to five years of the yellow pine in the old boardwalk, said City Council president Scott Mandel.

Though the city added LED energy-efficient lighting and Wi-Fi access along the boardwalk and beach, nostalgic touches remain. The old benches will be refurbished and reinstalled, and new light poles will mimic their predecessors.

The city has spent about \$2.7 million on the project so far. Completion of the section opening today met the 100-day deadline contracted between the

city and Plainview-based Grace Industries, city public works Commissioner Jim LaCarrubba said.

Grace's contract calls for the firm to complete the entire 2.2-mile structure by Nov. 12. City officials say the project is "on budget and on time" for completion.

The century-old boardwalk was a major tourism draw and holds cherished memories for

residents such as William and Sylvia Kestenbaum of Lido Beach, who joined the crowd yesterday to celebrate the re-opening of the place where they met.

"When we saw the boardwalk after Sandy, I was devastated; we cried. We had our first date on the boardwalk in 1942," Sylvia Kestenbaum said. "Seeing it now, we know Long Beach is back."