



LOCALLY DESIGNED — The new Key Largo Visitor Center, slated to be built at mile marker 106, is being designed by Homestead architect Robert Barnes.

Homestead talent tapped for Keys

Special to the News Leader

The local architectural firm of Robert Barnes and Associates has been charged with designing the new Key Largo Chamber of Commerce Visitor Center building.

Plans are complete and have been approved by the Monroe

County Planning Department. Construction on the new facility is expected to begin sometime the near future.

The new building will be located at the north end of the Mile Marker 106 Plaza, close to where the current visitor center now stands. The building will be a two story, independent structure with 4000 square feet of enclosed area, nearly twice the current facility's size.

The visitor center will occupy almost the entire ground floor, and the Key Largo Chamber of Commerce administrative and telephone service offices will be located on the upper level.

Nearly all the added space will be devoted to the visitor center lobby in order to better serve the

Key's visitors through promotion of the tourism industry and environmental education.

"We really needed more space," said Chamber president Ginna Thomas. "With more space we can better serve our members and expand certain services. It will also enable us to better prepare our visitors for their stay in Key Largo."

Thomas said the Chamber predicts a 10 to 20 percent increase in visitors once the new facility is complete. "We're expecting to top 200,000 visitors next year," she said.

In describing the new building, Robert Barnes of Robert Barnes and Associates said, "The new design features verandas, clerestory windows, cupolas, ship-lap siding and metal roofing, in keeping with the Florida Keys character."

The firm's past work includes the remodeling of the Greater Homestead Chamber of Commerce office located in Old Town Hall.