

Documentary to focus on story of first Pelican Island refuge manager

By Janet Begley

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A new documentary featuring the story of Paul Kroegel, the first refuge manager of Pelican Island, is being filmed in Indian River County.

“America’s Gatekeeper: The Story of Paul Kroegel” tells the story of a man whose deep and abiding love of nature was instrumental to protecting birds and wildlife along the coast of Florida. Marvo Entertainment Group of Princeton, Ky., is producing the one-hour documentary with the Cultural Council of Indian River County. It is expected to be released next spring at film festivals across the country and on PBS.

The story of Kroegel, a German immigrant who was appointed refuge manager by President Theodore Roosevelt, is the second in a series about heroes in the conservation movement. It includes segments shot in March during the celebration of Pelican Island’s 110th birthday, as well as commentary by Kroegel’s great-great-grandson, Nicholas Rouco.

“I am very excited at the prospect of being able to contribute to his legacy,” Rouco said. “When I was young, I was amazed at the fact that there was a statue dedicated to him. Being so young, I had not fully understood his impact. Several years later, I finally began to understand and appreciate the importance and the impact my great-great grandfather had on America’s history.”

The Cultural Council of Indian River County worked with Marvo Entertainment on the multimedia project. A short preview clip of the film was presented to the Sebastian City Council and the Indian River County Board of County Commissioners.

“Preserving our environment and its inhabitants is such a worthy endeavor,” said Barbara Hoffman, chairman of the Board of the Cultural Council of Indian River County she said. “To learn how one person can make such a difference in this world is inspiring to all, but especially to the young. This is a story that needs to be told.”

Some filming took place at the Paul Kroegel Homestead in Sebastian.

“What started with Paul and a small five-acre protected island has grown to a nationwide network of 556 refuges totaling over 150 million acres,” said Charlie Pelizza, Pelican Island National Wildlife

Refuge Manager. “Being only the third refuge manager in Pelican Island’s history, I am continually humbled to be in his company, and share in his dedication and passion. Knowing Paul and understanding the refuge management tradition that began with him is not only important for us to connect with today but also for the generations to come.”

Watch

To see the promotional video for the film project, visit marvoentertainmentgroup.com.

Visit

Pelican Island Wildlife Refuge: 4055 Wildlife Way, Vero Beach; 772-581-5557

Getting there: From Interstate 95, take exit 156 toward Sebastian via County Road 512 to U.S. 1. Local tour operators can be found off U.S. 1 and in Sebastian Inlet State Park off of A1A. For information, call the Indian River Chamber of Commerce at 772-567-3491.