

Family center will bring neighborhood together, officials say

Head Start program will be located there, as will other services

By MORRIS MALAKOFF

Situated in the Springwood public-housing complex behind a self-storage center along 132nd Avenue Southeast, the new Kent Family Center seems a little out of place at the moment.

But Mike Heinisch, executive director of Kent Youth and Family Services, believes that in time the center will fit in well and be the cornerstone of a new neighborhood on Kent's East Hill.

"We are hoping that this will break down the mental perimeter that has existed around Springwood," he said during a tour of the soon-to-be completed structure. "It can be a place that brings the neighborhood together."

Building a broader neighborhood will start with the center's massive public meeting room, which includes an outdoor terrace with a magnificent view of Mount Rainier.

The first event in that room will likely be a grand-opening celebration for the public at 11



David Nelson / Kent Reporter

A grand-opening celebration for the new Kent Family Center at Springwood Apartments will be held at 11 a.m. May 28. Construction began last summer.

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"This room will be available to community organizations rent-free," Heinisch said. "It is the only large meeting space, outside of using a school, on the East Hill."

The lower floor of the two-story, 22,000-square-foot building will house a combined Head Start program beginning May 10.

"We will bring the (Head Start) programs from the community center at Springwood

and from Holy Spirit Church to this building," said Heinisch. "We also will have work space for the staff that we don't currently have available."

Presently, the Springwood Head Start program is in the community center across the Springwood campus.

"We are getting ready to move," said teacher Dawna Coronado, standing in a classroom filled with children and packed boxes. "We take the kids over everyday, and they love it.

How to help

To make a donation to help furnish the Kent Family Center at Springwood Apartments, call Jim Berrios at (253) 852-6544.

They enjoy watching the construction workers."

The Kent Family Center fulfills a federal requirement that Head Start programs be housed in a permanent location when possible. The center's four spacious classrooms have large windows and hardwood floors.

Daily morning and afternoon Head Start sessions will service 128 children. The center also contains a kitchen and assorted rooms for crafts and other activities, as well as an indoor play area.

On the second floor of the disabled-accessible building will be offices for the Center for Career Alternatives, now housed in an apartment in the Springwood complex. The new office has plenty of space testing areas, job placement services and classes.

Also on the second floor is the Public Health-Seattle and King County's Women, Infant and Children clinic. Outfitted with examinations rooms, consultation rooms and an education and meeting area, the clinic

will serve 1,400 families a year with basic health and nutrition programs.

The \$4.7 million center was built under a partnership of the King County Housing Authority, Kent Youth and Family Services, the Center for Career Alternatives and Public Health.

Furnishing the building has required outside fund raising, led by Jim Berrios, owner of the Golden Steer Restaurant. Money has come from donors large and small, including the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. Donations are still being sought.

While the building is now under federal ownership, it will revert to the housing authority in 30 years. Kent Youth and Family Services will operate the center.

The family center is the first of two major projects slated for the Springwood complex. Later this year, the current community center will be razed and a two-story building, complete with a gymnasium, will be built with a target opening date of spring 2005.

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