

Third Street Center nonprofit collective comes to life

By Jeremy Heiman
Sopris Sun reporter

The first tenants are getting ready to move into the former Carbondale Elementary School building, which is being converted into a complex for nonprofit organizations, known as the Third Street Center.

"This pre-lease stage makes some office space available as construction begins on the rest of the facility," said Gavin Brooke of Land + Shelter and the developer on the project.

Workers have been remodeling "the quad," a group of four classrooms on the east side of the building, said Third Street Center Development Team member Jeff Dickinson of Energy & Sustainable Design.

Solar Energy International, Senior Matters and Mountain Valley Developmental Services have committed to lease three of the four spaces and will be moving in soon.

B & H General Contractors is currently working to complete the quad and bring restrooms into compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Other occupants of the building haven't been determined yet, though about 30 groups have put down deposits in order to be considered for space in the building.

Senior Matters

Senior Matters provides nutrition, transportation and activities programs for Carbondale seniors. Virginia Sterrett, who likes to be known as gina with a small "g," is chairman of Senior Matters.

"We want to start developing some more senior activities programs," Sterrett said.

Senior Matters hopes to move into its new space in March, which will be open on a daily basis for seniors to come in and visit during daytime hours.

Sterrett said the organization will add to its existing nutrition program by serving lunch to seniors every Friday at the Third Street Center. The group now provides a seniors' meal every Wednesday at Crystal Meadows in partnership with Garfield County, which transports food from the cafeteria at Valley View Hospital in Glenwood Springs.

"It's a very successful program," Sterrett said.

In the future, Senior Matters hopes to provide classes and educational resources on site. One example, she said, would be to bring in a speaker from the Colorado Bureau of Investigation who could provide information on how to avoid scams and swindles. The group also hopes to provide tutoring on computer use.

Senior Matters intends to make its Third Street Center space available to other organizations, when it's not in use, Sterrett said.

"It's a community thing," she said.



Top: Architect Jeff Dickinson reviews plans for the Third Street Center with capital campaign director Kristen Loden and Sara Plesset of Land + Shelter. Bottom: A new sign created by Craig Wheelless of Rainy Day Designs and Dana Wilson graces the fence along Highway 133. Photos by Trina Ortega

"Senior Matters is for seniors, but it's for the community, too." The Mt. Sopris Bridge Club has already made arrangements to meet at the Senior Matters space on Wednesday evenings.

Mountain Valley Developmental

Mountain Valley Developmental Services will operate a day program in its space, said Amanda Emerson, director of enrichment services for the organization. Mountain Valley provides services such as education, employment services and housing assistance for developmentally disabled people in Garfield County and three nearby counties.

About eight Mountain Valley clients live in Carbondale now, Emerson said.

The new space will be used to provide enrichment services for clients who are unable to work, including reading stories and taking trips into the community. The program here, similar to existing programs in Glenwood Springs and Silt, will start with a handful of clients and expand to serve about 14.

The design of the space is basic, and will include a small office for Mountain Valley case managers. The hours of op-

eration will probably be 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Emerson said she doesn't expect they will move in until about April, after work on restrooms is completed.

Solar Energy International

Johnny Weiss, executive director of Carbondale-based Solar Energy International, said the organization hasn't determined the exact use of their space, but currently needs classroom space and office space. SEI provides education on the design, installation and use of renewable energy systems and energy efficient building technologies.

"How we use the space remains to be determined," Weiss said. "But over time, we're definitely considering our options."

The organization, which has a presence in 17 different states, has needs that are constantly changing. "We're not real clear on exactly how many square feet we need at any given moment," Weiss added.

He said he's not sure when SEI will be able to move into the Third Street Center space, but the organization needs another Carbondale classroom very soon.

"We've outgrown our digs here, and we're looking forward to being part of the Third Street project," he said.

Third Street board of directors

The Town of Carbondale took possession of the building on October 31 in a land swap with the Roaring Fork School District. The project is being overseen by the Third Street Center board of directors and development team.

Board Members include Stacey Bernot, Richard Fuller, Laura Kirk, Dan Miller, Michael McVoy, Ro Mead, George Stranahan, and Shane Evans. The development team includes Gavin Brooke of Land + Shelter, Colin Laird of Roaring Fork Community Development Corporation and Jeff Dickinson of Energy and Sustainable Design.

To guide some of the design, management, and operational aspects of the Third Street Center, the development team has created a tenant advisory committee made up of representatives of nonprofits that have applied for leases in the building. Current members, according to the Third Street Center Web site, are Diane Johnson and Russ Criswell (Senior Matters), John Masters (Grassroots TV), Ro Mead (CCAH), Sandy Pickard (SEI), Evan Zislis (YouthZone) and Mountain Valley's Amanda Emerson.

Work on the building is continuing, Dickinson said. The group is currently working on modifications to the roof of the long hall to accommodate an array of photovoltaic (solar electric) panels that will contribute power toward the building's electrical demands.

"We're in the design phase on that," Dickinson said. Third Street Center is working with Ken Olsen and his firm, Sol Energy, to fit the hallway with a new roof, skylights and racks to hold enough photovoltaic panels to produce 50 kilowatts of juice.

Currently, a common room is available to be rented by groups and members of the community for events and projects. More information on renting this room can be found on the Third Street Center Web site.

The Third Street Center is scheduled to be fully open in the spring of 2010. "We're moving as fast as we can to get people in there," Dickinson said.

The next step

To learn more about the Third Street Center or discuss leasing opportunities, call Colin Laird at 963-5502. The Third Street Center Development Team holds brown bag lunches on the first Thursday of every month to discuss the project. More information is available at <http://thirdstreetcenter.net>.