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Catholic Charities to expand services to Hispanics



Architect's illustration of north elevation of the new Institute for the Hispanic Family.

By Mary J. Tunison

HARTFORD—Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Hartford plans to construct a \$6.5-million building for the Institute for the Hispanic Family into which it will expand and consolidate its programs.

The Institute for the Hispanic Family offers such social services as mental health treatment, day care and literacy and parenting classes to the city's Latino population. Its four main programs are a day care center, family center, senior center and a children/adults mental health behavioral center.

The largest social services ministry for the Latino population in Hartford, it serves more than 5,000 clients each year.

Located in the heart of the Latino community, the Institute has existed for more than 30 years. Currently, it leases approximately 11,000 square feet of space at 80 Jefferson St., sharing the facility with the Connecticut Children's Medical Center.

Rose Alma Senatore, chief executive officer of Catholic Charities, said that because so many of its clients live in the neighborhood, the objective was to stay within a one-mile radius of the current site.

The new, 22,000-square-foot structure will span from Wadsworth Street through the center

of the block to Cedar Street. Groundbreaking and construction are scheduled for March.

The new facility is designed to expand Catholic Charities' program capacity for the growing Latino community and to consolidate all of its programs under one roof.

"One of the greatest challenges we faced was space," Ms. Senatore explained. "Our capacity to meet the needs of those placed on our waiting lists has become very difficult, so the new building will allow us to be more responsive to the community and enable all programs to coexist under one roof in an integrated, collaborative inter-program environment."

About 50 employees currently staff the Institute; the number will increase when the new facility has been constructed.

The 2,000-square-foot senior center, now at 95 Park St., will join the other service programs at the new site.

"Seniors can now feel more connected to each other as well as the community," said Ms. Senatore. The day care, family and senior centers will be divided by wings but all will be located on one floor.

The senior center just wasn't adequate for the numbers it attracted, explained Ms. Senatore.

"We have 50-60 seniors attend-

ing our center every single day and, as a result, meals are taken in shifts and there are waiting lines at the restrooms."

The new building will feature a large dining area and activity room with ample restrooms. "So it's just going to be absolutely fabulous that the seniors will now have quality space and a place where they can come that's very warm, friendly and able to meet their social needs on a daily basis," said Ms. Senatore.

The Institute for the Hispanic Family will provide interaction among the generations. Although seniors will have programs of their own, they also will have the opportunity to lend their wisdom and skills to the children in the day care center.

"They are going to be on the first floor with the children. It will be a wonderful opportunity for us to connect our seniors with our children."

"The integration of the day care and family centers is a wonderful model that is supported by the Hartford Foundation," said Ms. Senatore. "It allows parents to attain literacy and other skills while their children are learning pre-K skills in day care. I think that's really important."

Ms. Senatore said the new facility will double the Institute's

capacity.

"In the child care program, we'll be able to go up from 34 slots to 60 slots, so we'll be able to serve more children that are in need."

The Institute for the Hispanic Family has received \$500,000 from the Archbishop's Annual Appeal. Another \$250,000 will be dispensed from last year's Appeal, according to Ms. Senatore.

The Institute was awarded a \$2 million bond from the state in 2005 for construction of the new facility.

"We are also in the process of receiving \$750,000 from the city of Hartford," Ms. Senatore said, adding that the approval process is ongoing, spanning a two-to-three-year period over which funds will be allocated for specific parts of the project.

In addition, The Hartford Foundation for Public Giving has approved a \$400,000 grant.

Catholic Charities has applied for a \$2.1 million CHEFA (Connecticut Health and Educational Facilities Authority) grant to be applied toward the new child care center. Approval is pending.

Ms. Senatore said the Institute's services are supported primarily through such government sources as CHEFA, which funds non-profit entities that provide essential health, educational, cultural and

child care services to the most Connecticut residents in communities that are in need.

"We have a lot of community funders that speak very highly of our program," said Ms. Senatore.

The artist's rendering of the building is complete. "We're out to get the bids for the subcontractors and we hope to be able to have a guaranteed market price for the project by March so that we can begin construction."

Over the past decade, the Hispanic population in the Hartford-metro area has grown to more than 40 percent of the current population, based on the 2000 U.S. census, reports the Mauricio Gaston Institute of the University of Massachusetts.

"Our ultimate goal is always to provide quality services," said Ms. Senatore, citing their licensed behavioral health center, which addresses such issues as drug or substance abuse, and is "really helping people to stabilize their life and meet their human potential."

Catholic Charities develops programs that help people through a network of service agencies.

"The goal is to meet the needs of every single person that comes to the Institute," said Ms. Senatore. "Our mission is to help people become self-sufficient, to reach their potential."