

THE ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

LOCAL SECTION

Monday, May 7, 2007

YMCA gets \$4 million donation for new center

The nonprofit hopes the funding will help kick off construction of the new Santa Ana YMCA in 2008.

By AMY TAXIN
The Orange County Register

SANTA ANA – For three years, the site for the new Santa Ana YMCA has been just that – a site.

But officials at the nonprofit say that's poised to change after they received a \$4 million donation to build a new recreation center in a city with one of the youngest populations nationwide.

"What makes this exciting is we're getting back to where we came from – Santa Ana – and we're going into a community where we believe we're going to be able to have a significant impact," said Art Wannlund, President of the YMCA of Orange County.

The donation by Newport Beach residents Russ and Kathy Van Cleve is the biggest ever received by the YMCA and pushes funding for the \$20 million Santa Ana project past the halfway mark – to the point where construction could begin next year.

The Santa Ana facility will be the first new YMCA built in the county in 40 years. Construction was delayed on the project – which will feature a swimming pool, fitness center and after-school tutoring programs – due to difficulties obtaining funding and rising construction costs.

Van Cleve, a 60-year old real estate developer, said he first learned of the project through a friend at his gym in Newport Beach. He and his wife Kathy had long donated to charities and their church. After a cancer scare last year, he said he felt the urge to give more.

"You want to make sure you make things count and happen – not wish you had," he said.



NEW YMCA: Jon Voget, YMCA executive director, left, is shown with donors Kathy Van Cleve and her husband Russell at the site of the new YMCA in Santa Ana.
LEONARD ORTIZ, THE ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

Map

YMCA on the way



The Register

New Santa Ana YMCA

Construction is expected to start next year on the 32,000 square foot center, which will include:

- a 25-meter, six-lane outdoor swimming pool
- a turf-lined soccer arena with organized youth leagues
- a technology center with a computer lab and areas for after-school tutoring
- a fitness center and aerobics studio

Source: YMCA of Orange County

THE ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

LOCAL SECTION

Today, the YMCA has four fitness centers in Orange County but none in its central core. The YMCA opened its first facility in the county in 1925 in downtown Santa Ana but left in the early 1990s due to financial troubles during the area's economic downturn.

The new center will cater to about 15,000 people in Santa Ana and Costa Mesa. It will also enable the YMCA to hire full-time staff to expand its after-school programs at campuses throughout Santa Ana, which currently reach 5,000 children a year, said Jon Voget, the new YMCA's executive director.

Tristan Martinez, 7, said he likes the after-school program he attends through YMCA at Thorpe Elementary in Santa Ana. He enjoys playing handball and would like the chance to learn how to swim once a pool is built next door. But he mostly likes learning.

"We learn how to read and do stuff, and I like that," he said. "We learn how to do math so we can go to college."

Neighbors chatter about the advantages of having a fitness center and activities for children but worry about traffic on streets already packed with cars heading to and from nearby schools.

Donovan Bayron, of the Metro Classic neighborhood, hopes the center will be a place for teens to mentor young children. "Other than South Coast Plaza, where a lot of people congregate, I can't think of a place where you can bring people from a lot of different ages in the community together and do things together," he said.

The YMCA is one of two remaining pieces of the Armstrong Ranch development, which includes houses, a school and the future site of the Diocese of Orange's cathedral.

The Segerstrom family donated 2.5 acres to the YMCA in 2004. Since then, the YMCA has been seeking funding for the project – and still needs about \$8 million. Officials say donors wanted to see signs the project was under way before making a contribution.

"It's like a school dance and no one's dancing out there and then one person goes out on the dance floor and everyone joins in," said Tino Rivera, board chairman for the new Santa Ana YMCA.