



1st Quarter 2013 Newsletter

The Salvador Foundation is committed to serving God by bringing together people from all walks of life for the common cause of helping our fellow man. We, as the body of Christ, have a responsibility to care for those in need. By helping and enabling people one project at a time, our goal is to share encouragement, hope and faith.

Update on Westside Community Center

In 2010, overburdened budgets within Colorado Springs City Government has led to the scheduled closing of four local community centers. Community centers are the heart and soul of their neighborhoods, and for some seniors, they're a place to get a \$2 lunch and escape the loneliness of being home alone. For parents, they're a place to send their children to preschool or hang out while the parents are working. For teens and young adults, they offer a place to exercise or play league basketball instead of hanging out on the streets.

These Centers are in the city's poorer neighborhoods and serve a largely working-class population. Between 43,800 and 68,500 people visit each of the centers annually, according to city documents. According to City Councilman Sean Page, closure of the community centers will have a significant impact on those people who currently depend upon them.

Early in 2010, the Salvador Foundation agreed to team with Woodmen Valley Chapel (WVC) in Colorado Springs to fund the West Side Community Center and keep the doors open. It has been 3 years since the Center was started, and an agreement has recently been signed with the city of Colorado Springs to extend our collaboration for an additional three years. A recent article in the Westside Pioneer Newspaper summarizes the journey:

[Westside Pioneer December 2012]

Optimistic' LLC agrees with city to keep operating Westside Community Center at least through 2015

Three years ago at this time, the Westside Community Center was on the verge of closing. Today, the center remains open and the outlook appears bright after the city and a limited liability corporation (LLC) of Woodmen Valley Chapel this week renewed their agreement through the end of 2015.

"We're very optimistic about the future," said Dick Siever, the center's director. "We're hoping to fill the void we think is there, including more programs for middle school and high school kids from the Westside. That's an area we need to continue to focus on and to improve. The goal will always be to provide programs that are affordable to the Westside neighborhood."



Dick Siever, Westside Community Center director.

Westside Pioneer file photo

The center operates out of three buildings on a 2.8-acre property at Bijou and 17th streets that used to be Buena Vista Elementary School. In November 2009, looking ahead to a tight 2010 budget year, the city was facing the gloomy prospect of closing all its community centers because it could no longer afford to run them. At the Westside Community Center alone, the city general

fund was subsidizing over 80 percent of the cost (more than \$300,000 a year).



Several Air Force Academy cadets - among about 50 in all who were helping out - unload a freezer during the moving day that brought the Westside CARES pantry to the center in April 2010.

Westside Pioneer file photo

Sean Paige, then representing the older Westside's District 3, convinced other City Councilmembers to keep the centers open for the first quarter of 2010 to allow time for fundraising as well as the preparation of a city request for proposals in case any private entities might want to take over one or more of the centers at no cost to the city.

The only such request, as it turned out, came from the Center for Strategic Ministry, a nonprofit arm of the Woodmen Valley Chapel that focuses on community outreach and stabilizing families. The group took over in April 2010. Its initial agreement with the city lasts through the end of this year.

That agreement, like the new one, guarantees no city funds to the center, although the city was able to allocate \$75,000 in 2011.

An early sign of frugality under the LLC was that its first-year budget for the center was less than half of the \$400,000 the city had spent the year before. Volunteers

became a regular part of the scenery, cleaning, organizing, planning, fundraising and setting up activities. People from the church were a big part of the effort, but Siever said that Westsiders have also pitched in. He pointed out "a man from the neighborhood who walked two blocks here and mowed our yard all summer."

Other reasons for the LLC's success have been "increased participation in programs" along with "generous funding from several foundations and trusts," Siever said.

The center offers a range of classes, events, activities and programs, with many discounted or free. Some offerings carried over from when the city ran the center, such as the Billie Spielman Center, the Golden Circle Meals program, senior trips and various classes. The LLC has added health and dental care opportunities for low-income children, a nurse's center, bicycle repair clinics, table tennis, a fitness center, sound upgrades to the gym (often rented now as a hall), after-school programs for Westside elementaries, summer activity programs for youth, hundreds of free hot meals from its mobile kitchen, the relocation of the Westside CARES pantry and the designation of the site as a polling place in November for the first time since 2006.



Working on assigned tasks are some of the 100 or so volunteers who helped build about 70 raised beds for the Pikes Peak Urban Gardens-led community garden at the center in October 2010.

Westside Pioneer file photo

Major projects with sizable volunteer involvement have included building the raised beds for the center's community garden, relocating the Westside CARES pantry/food distribution program and creating off-street parking in part of the old school playground.

"We're thrilled to continue our partnership with the Westside Community Center LLC to provide programs and services at the Westside Community Center," said Karen Palus, Director of Parks, Recreation and Cultural Services, in a prepared statement. "Thousands of our citizens are benefitting from the wide range of

opportunities provided by our partner organization. Having this kind of positive impact in the community is what our department strives for with each and every facility and program.”

The city had taken over the property as part of School District 11's complicated “consolidation” of 2009, when it closed three Westside schools, created West Elementary (taking over space the community center had used in West Middle School) and moved Buena Vista into one of the closed schools (Washington).

“The City of Colorado Springs has been a wonderful partner,” Siever said in a prepared statement. “We especially appreciate the leadership and support provided by our City liaison Kim King, Parks Administration, Recreation and Cultural Services Manager. We are enjoying becoming a part of the Westside neighborhood!”

Westside Pioneer/press release

EDITOR'S DESK

The city, not to mention the Westside, got very lucky in 2010. The [preceding] article gives the basic history of the deal that brought the action arm of the Woodmen Valley Chapel to the Westside Community Center - at a time when City Council had no viable option other than closure - and the successes leading up to the three-year extension that keeps the Woodmen group in place at least through 2015.

But the article does not go into the politics that threatened to keep the agreement from even happening in the spring of 2010. Talk about looking a gift horse in the mouth. Even after Woodmen's Dick Siever



(now the center director) had explained to council that the Westside Community Center LLC was asking nothing of the city except a chance to run the place, there were people pleading with council not to accept the offer. There were also numerous rumors - anonymously started, but you know who you are - all seeming to grow out of the fear that the center would transmogrify into some kind of God Shop, where the Christians would do horrible things... like what? Help people? Run the center twice as efficiently as the city did? Create or expand informational and self-betterment opportunities? Set up a garden? Give the Westside CARES pantry a better location?

What generally goes unreported (because Siever likes

to stay low-key) is why complaints from the surrounding neighborhood are few and far between. That's because the center goes out of its way to reach out to those who live nearby and make them feel like part of the effort.

Looking back, it's hard to imagine the Westside without the center we have now. So, for those of you who always (understandably) ask for "good news," I offer the LLC's new three-year agreement with the city. It doesn't come better than this.

- K.J.

The Salvador Foundation is currently supporting efforts in the US and Latin America. If you would like further information on this or any other activities, please contact:

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