

Vineland Community Learning Complex Opens Downtown

This report was compiled from information supplied by Kevin McElroy of the NJ Schools Development Authority and F. John Sbrana of the Vineland Public Schools Communications Department.

Officials of the Vineland School District, the New Jersey Schools Development Authority (SDA) and the City of Vineland held a grand opening last month for the new elementary school at the Vineland Community Learning Complex in the downtown area.

The 21st century community facility for 830 pre-kindergarten through fifth grade students is a New Jersey demonstration project designed to be the cornerstone of revitalization efforts in the downtown area of the city.

Students, parents, residents, area officials and representatives of agencies that played key roles in the demonstration project were on hand for the ribbon-cutting ceremony. The SDA funded the school construction. Project co-developers include Joseph Jingoli & Son, Inc., Tri-County Community Action Partnership and Cumberland Empowerment Zone Corporation. It was designed by USA Architects, Planners and Interior Designers, P.A.

The event also marked the completion of the second of six state-designated demonstration projects - public/private community development initiatives that require new schools to incorporate community components into their design. The demonstration projects are designed to serve as a catalyst for private investment to revitalize urban communities with new housing and retail opportunities.

"What a Christmas present," said Charles Ottinger, Superintendent of Schools. "I believe the downtown community school project to be one of the most important projects ever undertaken in our community. The school and everything it represents will be the centerpiece for learning for students and community members of all ages. Vineland is very fortunate to be among those communities who were given the opportunity to participate in this wonderful project whose impact on the community will last for years and years to come."

"This has been a tedious, strenuous project," said Mayor Perry Barse. "But we put together a great team and you see the results."

Barse pointed out that the city will save more than \$350,000 a year when the project is complete and the IMPACT pre-school center and Vineland Adult Education program can move out of rented facilities.

"This project is not about geography," said Barse. "Our vision was to create a center of

community learning and recreation and social interaction. We thank everyone who is helping to make this vision a reality.”

“You just have to see this facility to believe it,” said Frank Giordano, Vineland Board of Education president. “This is the greatest day in the history of Vineland, if you ask me.”

“The opening of the new Petway and Wallace Schools and the renovations at Veterans Memorial were frosting on the cake,” said Giordano. “This is the cherry on top. Our thanks to everyone involved in the project.”

The school will open to students from Cunningham Elementary School in January following the holiday break. Students from the school led the flag salute, and participated in the ribbon cutting while the school’s Center City Glee Club entertained the audience with several songs. In one of the more emotional moments of the ceremony, principal Monica Dannenberger and some students presented a giant “thank you” card to representatives of the Jingoli firm. The card read “Dear Jingoli and Sons. Thank you for building our new school. Love, The students at Cunningham.”

“On behalf of the SDA, I am pleased to celebrate another milestone in the ongoing efforts to provide 21st century schools for the students of Vineland,” said Scott Weiner, SDA Chief Executive Officer. “The Center City School demonstrates how, by investing in the community, we are making real progress toward revitalizing neighborhoods. Another new school is on the horizon for this city, and we look forward to

continuing to work as partners with the school district and city officials and collaborating with them throughout the entire development and construction process.”

Besides the Center City School, other projects completed by the SDA in Vineland include the expansion of Veterans Memorial School and construction of Thomas W. Wallace Jr. Middle School and the Pauline J. Petway Elementary School - the first new schools built in this Cumberland County city since 1976. Overall, that represents more than \$100 million in new or refurbished educational facilities for the children of Vineland. The district is also in line for construction of another new middle school on South Lincoln Avenue near Butler Avenue, which is now in design.

The 126,000-square-foot Center City School - built on a 9.7-acre campus off S.E. Boulevard and Montrose Street - includes 46 classrooms and community health and social services, adult education and recreational

facilities. The community design features were an outgrowth of an intensive year-long planning process that involved more than 40 stakeholder community groups/representatives. Features accessible to the

community during-non-school hours include computer labs, a cafeteria with kitchen, an auditorium, a gym, playgrounds and athletic areas, and areas for advanced learning for the students during regular school hours

and the community after the school day. A library/media center will house Vineland Public

Library's "Youth Reading Readiness" program and be operated by the Library. A wellness center will provide primary, preventative and dental health care for the students with operating support and staffing from Community Healthcare, Inc., a non-profit affiliated with South Jersey Healthcare System.

The \$57.4 million Center City School construction project included \$54.7 million funding from the SDA and \$2.7 million from the local district. The New Jersey Economic Development Authority (EDA) finalized two New Markets loans and an equity investment with partner Boscov's Department Stores totaling \$3.5 million for the facility's Adult Education Center and community pool. EDA Chief Executive Officer Caren S. Franzini said the structure of this project's tax credits made possible one of the few true equity investments using New Markets Tax Credits in the country.

Additional administrative and funding assistance for the community design features were provided by several not-for-profit and community organizations, such as the Y.M.C.A., the South Jersey Healthcare System, and the Vineland Public Library.

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