

YMCA will donate building to Christian school

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By Paul Swiech

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BLOOMINGTON — Bloomington-Normal YMCA announced Friday that it will donate its building at 602 S. Main St. to Cornerstone Christian Academy after the Y moves into its facility on the far east side in 2009.

Last year, the YMCA requested proposals from nonprofit organizations interested in being granted the Y building, located south of downtown.

"From the board's perspective, we thought it was important for this building to continue to serve the needs of the community," said Christi Phillips, the YMCA board secretary and a State Farm Insurance Cos. systems department program manager. Selling the building would have given the Y money for its new building but would not have ensured the location would continue to serve people in the neighborhood, she said.

Cornerstone is a non-denominational, independent Christian school that serves about 450 children from age 3 through 12th grade at its location on Ireland Grove Road east of Bloomington.

Administrator Becky Shames told the Pantagraph that Cornerstone plans to use the Y building as an early childhood education center for three-year-olds through third graders who can't afford tuition at Cornerstone. Before- and after-school programs also will be offered, she said.

"We have been called to serve the kids on the west side of Bloomington who can't afford tuition here (at Cornerstone)," she said. Because the early childhood education center will not be tuition-based, Cornerstone will raise money to support programs there, Shames said.

The building will be renovated into classroom space but some athletic facilities, such as the gymnasium, will remain, Shames said.

"We knew three years ago that God was calling us to reach out to children who couldn't afford to come to Cornerstone," Shames said. Shames said Cornerstone leaders were "praying for a building" when they read a Pantagraph article about the Y board's intent to donate the building to a qualified nonprofit organization.

"We are celebrating, rejoicing in what God has done for us," she said. "It's amazing."

YMCA Executive Director Dennis Mohrman said Cornerstone has demonstrated an ability to maintain buildings and raise money and has a well-rounded program that includes physical education. In addition, both Cornerstone and the YMCA are faith-based institutions, Mohrman said.

The two other organizations that filed formal applications to be given the Y building were the Boys

and Girls Club of Bloomington-Normal and Crosswinds Community Church. Representatives of those organizations were not immediately available for comment on Friday morning.

The YMCA board announced a couple of years ago that the Y had outgrown the building at 602 S. Main St. and the building couldn't be expanded at that land-locked site. Six acres of undeveloped land on Tullamore Avenue off of Ireland Grove Road and south of the Central Illinois Regional Airport were donated for a new building.

The Y board is in a campaign to raise \$10 million of \$12.5 million needed to build the 62,500-square-foot Family YMCA that will more than double the Y's ability to serve families and will expand programming, Mohrman said.

Ground will be broken before the end of this year and the building should open in late spring or early summer 2009, Mohrman said. The Bloomington-Normal Transit Authority has committed to a "tripper" service that would bus children from 602 S. Main St. to the new YMCA during busy times, Mohrman said.

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