

Officials envision FTC, Civic partnership

BY JONI HUBBRED
STAFF WRITER
jhubbred@eccehomecomm.net

Farmington city and school officials have no trouble picturing a brand new cooperative relationship between the facilities they've renovated and expanded for use by local businesses.

"The potential is limitless and the space is fabulous," said Farmington Schools Superintendent Bob Maxfield at Friday's grand re-opening of the Farmington Training Center on Thomas Street.

Maxfield could easily see a business hosting an initial gathering at the Farmington Civic Theatre, a city-owned facility that reopened last year after extensive remodeling, then moving to the Training Center for break-out sessions. "I believe in a short time, there'll be thousands of people coming through these doors."

With some funds set aside in the district's last bond referendum and some capital fund money, the district put a new face on the time-worn facility, creating meeting spaces

designed to cater to the business community. Rooms can accommodate groups of 10 to 150 participants, and the facility offers a variety of multi-media equipment, including a computer lab equipped with 12 Dell computers and an Epson data projector.

Room rates range from \$100-\$300 for a half-day to \$175-\$500 for a full day.

Groups can engage the services of a variety of area caterers. However, if catering services aren't used, attendees could patronize downtown coffee shops and restaurants.

In fact, Farmington Mayor Jim Mitchell hopes they do.

Mitchell sees the facility as a real boon to re-development in the city, which is nearly built out.

"I'm amazed. I really am," he said before Friday's ribbon cutting ceremony. "I think the community as a whole will benefit from this facility. Redevelopment is really in our future, and this is one of those facilities we can point to."

Parking issues?

While the Training Center

may draw hundreds of people to an event, parking is somewhat limited.

Curriculum Director Jerry Fouchey, who is also serving as the FTC Building Manager, said the Center has hosted up to 230 people. He encouraged car pooling for the largest event.

There are 180 parking spaces on site; 20 were added last summer, he said. Additional parking is available in a city lot located on Orchard, the former U.S. Post office site.

That's not too far a walk, according to Fouchey. "It's less

than you'd travel at Twelve Oaks Mall."

Maxfield said with larger events, "We've had to alert (Farmington Public Safety Director) Gary Goss to be a little patient with us."

Down the road, he said, the city and school district might want to look at a joint venture to create a parking structure of some kind. The district has also had a positive, cooperative relationship with the First United Methodist Church on Grand River.

Farmington City Manager Frank Lauhoff sees the conference center setting as a welcome and positive addition because it will bring people downtown.

Though the city has promoted the use of the historic Civic Theatre on Grand River as a "conference center," Lauhoff was realistic about the situation.

"The theatre is limited. It is permanently a theater," he said, adding the Civic is a great venue for presentations and concerts.

During a tough budget year, Maxfield said he would consider using the FTC for board retreats as was done in the past. Recently these retreats were held at the Doubtree Suites Hotel in Novi.

"It (the FTC) is more comfortable than it used to be," Maxfield said.

—Staff writer Sue Buck contributed to this story

Red Cross chapter celebrates by recognizing volunteers

The Southeastern Michigan Chapter of the American Red Cross is celebrating Red Cross Month this March by recognizing some of the thousands of people who have helped our community this year through the Red Cross.

Thanks to the help of some 15,000 volunteers in Wayne, Oakland and Macomb counties, the local Red Cross was able to provide relief to over 1,700 families struck by disaster; train tens of thousands in lifesaving skills such as first-aid, CPR and water safety; help local military families communicate during emergencies; facilitate blood drives and much more.

"Many people don't realize that most Red Cross work is done by local volunteers in local communities, and is funded by voluntary contributions from local citizens and businesses," said Rose Hirsch, Director of Volunteer Services for the Southeastern Michigan Chapter. "We certainly would like to encourage those interested in community service to use 'Red Cross Month' as a time to consider volunteering for the Red Cross."

Each year, the President of the United States, the honorary chairman of the Red Cross, proclaims March "Red Cross Month." The tradition began in March of 1943 with a declaration by President Franklin D. Roosevelt in response to the need to raise money for the War Fund.

Today, the Southeastern Michigan Chapter has a need to raise money that is greater than ever in its history.

After the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks, Americans poured out their hearts — and their pocketbooks — to assist those affected by the attacks. Because the financial contributions are dedicated to victims and survivors of the attack, many local Red Cross chapters are facing budget crises. The economic recession has hurt fundraising efforts as well.

For these reasons, the Southeastern Michigan Chapter is encouraging people to consider "Red Cross Month" as a time to financially support the chapter so that it can continue to provide the necessary services to the communities it serves.

The American Red Cross of Southeastern Michigan is the organization that turns caring into action by providing disaster relief and helping people prevent, prepare and respond to emergencies.

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