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Underserved 6th District Community To Benefit Significantly From Ray And Joan Kroc Corps Community Center

■ By Tyler Reeb
Editor

Community leaders and elected officials gathered earlier this month to celebrate the City of Long Beach's selection as one of six cities in the western United States to receive a \$70-\$80 million endowment to construct a Ray and Joan Kroc Corps Community Center that will be managed by The Salvation Army.

"We are celebrating what will be the greatest Salvation Army building program ever built in the Southern California division," said Major Paul Seiler, who, along with his wife, Carol, oversees The Salvation Army's Southern California Division, which includes the counties of Los Angeles, Orange, Ventura and Santa Barbara.

In 2004, McDonald's heiress Joan Kroc gave The Salvation Army an estate gift of more than \$1.5 billion for the sole purpose of building Kroc Centers in communities throughout the United States. She gave the funds to The Salvation Army on the condition that none of the monies could be used for existing programs, services or administrative costs.

Construction of the community center will transform an underutilized 19-acre property called Hamilton Bowl - a flood detention basin used for sports fields, which has fallen into disrepair over the last several years - located at the corner of Pacific Coast Highway and Walnut Avenue near Long Beach City College's Pacific Coast Campus. The facility is one of six centers in The Salvation Army's western territory slated for construction to provide family support, educational, recreational and cultural arts activities for community members. The other cities selected for Kroc Centers include: Coeur d'Alene, Idaho; Honolulu; Phoenix-South Mountain, Arizona; Salem, Oregon; and San Francisco.

Engineering firm Moffatt & Nichol will modify the Hamilton Bowl's current flood detention basin to accommodate the new community center, said Phil Hester, Long Beach's Director of Parks, Recreation and Marine.

In addition to enhancing the site's current water detention basin functionality, the new

community center will also incorporate an existing shopping and retail center along Pacific Coast Highway, said Richard Dilday, vice president of Heery International. Dilday, who directed his firm's architectural work on the project, told the Business Journal the new community center will provide a safe haven for the families that use the facility.

"One thing we talked about in the design process was safe from harm. There's going to be one way in and one way out. The surrounding area is all protected," he said, noting that a Beacon of Hope will adorn the northwest corner of Pacific Coast Highway and Walnut Avenue.

Major Paul Seiler shares Dilday's optimism. "The bottom line is this is going to be a life-changing place for the kids and the adults in our community. It's going to be an oasis where kids can feel safe and can come to be part of the educational programs, be a part of recreational programs and be a part of programs for spiritual renewal. And we're delighted that that is going to happen right here in Long Beach," he said, noting that half of the \$70-\$80 million gift to Long Beach from Kroc will finance construction of the facility and the other half will go toward an endowment to fund annual programs and events.

According to The Salvation Army, roughly \$25 million additional dollars will need to be raised to complete the project. Long Beach Grand Prix founder Chris Pook is expected to spearhead those fundraising efforts.

The 19-acre Salvation Army Ray and Joan Kroc Corps Community Center in Long Beach will include:

- an education, arts and cultural complex, supported by a library, computer resource center, classrooms, auxiliary spaces, social spaces, a chapel and an auditorium;
- a state-of-the-art aquatics center with three pools, a four-court gymnasium with an elevated jogging track and an extensive weight and fitness area;
- an administrative and family resource center that will include a drop-in daycare to serve families who are using the center's resources; and
- a series of outdoor spaces that consist of field space for active (soccer, football, little league baseball, etc) and passive activity (picnic), along with an amphitheater for larger scale outdoor cultural events. Additionally, low-key walking paths for community members to enjoy with their families will be designed in the context of street and neighborhood environments.

Securing the Kroc center endowment "is an incredible accomplishment," Long Beach Mayor Beverly O'Neill said. The facility, which is set to break ground in 2007 and open in 2009, will positively impact the surrounding area, she contended.

Sixth District Councilmember Laura Richardson echoed the mayor's sentiments, noting that Hamilton Bowl, in its current state, "is nothing but a dust bowl" that brings negative elements to the district she represents. "The Salvation Army and the Kroc center will help us make that [acreage] the jewel it really should be and encourage our young people and our adults to really do their best here in Long Beach."

Traditional social service programs offered by The Salvation Army, such as homeless

feeding and emergency family services, will not be offered at the Kroc Center. According to The Salvation Army, individuals seeking such assistance will be referred to the organization's existing programs throughout the city and surrounding areas. ■