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SETON RESIDENTIAL CENTER MOVING TO YONKERS

Gary Stern
gstern@lohud.com



Rendering by Perkins Eastman

Construction will begin soon in Yonkers on a state-of-the-art, \$125 million residential nursing facility for severely disabled children, most of whom cannot walk, eat or breathe on their own.

Archbishop Timothy Dolan will lead a Sept. 10 groundbreaking ceremony for the new Elizabeth Seton Pediatric Center, which is to open in 2011 on a 6.5-acre site in South Westchester Executive Park.

The center has been in Manhattan's Chelsea neighborhood since its founding in 1987 by the Sisters of Charity, a Roman Catholic religious order. Facing the end of its lease in 2012, the center purchased land in Yonkers last year and

began planning for a four-story, 136-bed facility that will enable the best care for children from infancy to age 21.

"You can't describe the work that these folks are doing," said William F. Harrington, a prominent Westchester lawyer and supporter of Catholic institutions who is chairman of the capital campaign for the new facility. "There are very few hospitals that provide this type of care."

The center is to include a specially designed pool for water therapy, physical therapy, occupational therapy and speech therapy centers, therapy gardens, a gymnasium, 15 classrooms, a chapel and mediation room.

Nurses and other staff members were involved in the complete design, from bedrooms to playgrounds.

Since most children who live at the center travel in wheelchairs or other assisted vehicles, the new facility will have specially designed and colored ceilings to act as location markers and to provide visual stimulation.

"We've had the opportunity to create a space that will really meet the needs of the children and their caregivers," said Jane M. Boyle, executive director of development for Elizabeth Seton Pediatric Center. "In our facility today, we don't have an inch of space to spare."

The Sisters of Charity started the center to care for children who are discharged from acute-care hospitals but need ongoing nursing and rehabilitative care for a range of complex disabilities. Many of the children admitted have congenital heart disease, chronic lung disease, respiratory disorders, muscular and neurological diseases, cerebral palsy or immunodeficiency syndromes.

About half are younger than 5. A quarter are ages 5-12, and another quarter are 12-21. The average length of stay at the Seton center is 3 1/2 years. About 12 to 15 children die there each year.

"Some are discharged to their homes, which is always our objective," Boyle said. "We have a home-care service that will follow a child home."

Most of the children come from low-income families in New York City and Westchester and Putnam counties.

The Seton center also runs a special-education school. A campus at the main facility serves the children who live there, and a campus at the site of the former St. Agnes Hospital in White Plains serves about 300 children from two dozen school districts in the region. The White Plains

campus will be refurbished as part of the project.

Most of the project is to be funded by a \$100 million loan from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Harrington said, and a foundation run by the Sisters of Charity is expected to contribute about \$17 million.

The Seton center approached Harrington several years ago to help find a location for its new home. He contacted city officials in Yonkers and was instrumental in bringing the parties together.

Since then, he has been working to raise \$20 million to \$25 million more. Though the project's official price tag is \$125 million, he said costs may run to \$145 million "to do all we want to be able to do."

"This is a tough time to raise funds from individuals," Harrington said. "But for the last year and a half I've been asking people from Westchester, prominent people, to come down and visit the center. Every one of them, they come away shaking their heads after they see what's being done for the kids. We're going to be all right."

The center's namesake, Elizabeth Seton, was a New York City native and convert to Catholicism who dedicated her life to caring for the needy.