

Community news

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David and Ruth Asper Early Learning Centre to open July 13

By BERNIE BELLAN

Rome was not built in a day – and neither was the brand new David and Ruth Asper Early Learning Centre! Scheduled to begin operations July 13, the day care centre will occupy what was formerly a fire hall at 1710 Grosvenor Avenue (between Renfrew and Lanark Streets). The twists and turns that followed the building of this gorgeous facility are dizzying.

Plans for a new day care to complement the Kaufman Child Care Centre, operated by the Rady JCC at the Asper Campus, were actually announced in 2011 – before any of the children who will be attending the new facility on Grosvenor were even born! Back then the Government of Manitoba had promised that it would provide a \$325,000 grant for construction of the new daycare provided “shovels in the ground” were in place by the winter of 2012.

For a time it looked like the new day care would be located in the Herzlia-Adas Yeshurun Synagogue (now known as the Adas Yeshurun-Herzlia Synagogue). Those plans, however, fell apart in July 2013. Then, in an unexpected turn of events the Rady JCC was able to acquire the fire hall on Grosvenor after the individual whose bid to purchase the fire hall had been accepted by City Council withdrew his offer in favour of the Rady JCC in February 2014.

From that point on plans fell quickly into place and the renovation of the fire hall to convert it into a day care began in the fall of 2015. Designed by Architecture49 and built by Westland Construction, the \$1.4 million David and Ruth Asper Early Learning Centre promises to fill a vital need in Winnipeg for more day care spaces.

We were taken on a tour of the new building last week by Gayle Waxman, Rady JCC Executive Director, and Elonora Caparolini, Child Care Director for both the new day care and the existing Kaufman Child Care Centre at the Campus. Waxman said that the wait list of children whose parents would like to obtain access to either day care operated by the Rady JCC has grown to a staggering 920. (Just a couple of years ago that wait list was 700 although, to be fair, it's not easy to know exactly just how bad the shortage of day care spaces is in the city. Parents can put their names on the wait lists for an unlimited number of day care facilities in Winnipeg through a registry maintained by the Province of Manitoba. According to Waxman, if a day care space opens up and a parent whose name is on the wait list does not choose to put their child into one of the day cares operated by the Rady JCC, while they drop to the bottom of the Rady JCC's wait list, they do not impair their chances of being accepted into any other day care upon whose list their name appears. Further, while the new day care, just like the one at the Campus, will have a strong orientation toward Jewish values, there is no preference given to parents who are Jewish.)

Touring the facility, which will be open from 7:00 am – 5:30 pm weekdays, I was shown the three individual rooms that will house children in different age groups: for children from ages two up to three; for three up to four; and for four up to five. In addition, according to Caparolini, there will be room for four infants (up to two years of age). By the way, as is the case with the Kaufman Child Care Centre, parents dropping off and picking up their children will have staggered drop off and pick up times in order to avoid traffic congestion.

There are many thoughtful touches that went into the design of the new day care, such as tall windows that will easily allow children to look out at the adjoining Sir John Franklin Recreation Centre – and the nearby train tracks. (What child isn't fascinated watching a train go by?) Children will also have access to Sir John Franklin, so that they will be able to be taken there for skating in the winter, for instance.

One especially adorable feature of the new day care is the three toilet stalls for children; two of them have no doors, but the third one does have a door – for privacy. (The stalls are short enough, however, that any adult can look right over them, so the “privacy” is not quite absolute.)

Waxman also pointed out that there is not an abundance of toys here. “We



Room 1 - for two-three-year-olds, donated by Marjorie and the late Morley Blankstein



Room 2 - for three-four-year-olds, donated by Nora and Harry Warren



Room 3 - for four-five-year-olds, donated by Tova and Larry Vickar



The fully kosher kitchen - as with the Kaufman Child Care Centre, all food will be dairy.



While there are some toys, Gayle Waxman says, “We don't want to overwhelm the kids with toys.”



Rainwater will be funneled into receptacles, from which children will be able to draw water for plants in the garden, giving youngsters an understanding of ecology.

don't want to overwhelm the kids with toys,” she explained. I asked whether there is a TV or any computers and she responded, “no”.



The creatively designed sandbox

An interesting feature on the outside of the building is pipes that will funnel rain water into receptacles, from which children will be able to draw water for plants that they will be growing in a garden, so that they begin to experience the ecological system early on. Even the sandbox is thoughtfully constructed to stimulate the children more than what you might expect from a typical sandbox.

Many different individuals contributed to the construction of the new day care, including: David and Ruth Asper; Marjorie and the late Morley Blankstein; Nora and Harry Warren; Larry and Tova Vickar; Marvin Peters; Sarah and Debbie Gray; Cheryl and Earl Barish; Shane, Norman, and Michael Silver; as well as the Jewish Foundation of Manitoba. (We apologize if some names have been inadvertently omitted. We hope to have a more complete list of donors at a future date.) The total raised to date, including grants and private contributions, comes to \$1.25 million, which means there's still room to contribute, if you're interested. Contact Gayle Waxman at gwaxman@radyjcc.com.

Finally, while the day care opens officially on July 13, a date for a grand opening ceremony, likely to be held in the fall, has not yet been set.