

Funding Boost Moves Kroc Center Closer to Reality

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ERIC SMITH | The Daily News

No matter what happens with the overall redevelopment of the Mid-South Fairgrounds – a project that could be scaled back in light of the economy – the plan to build the Kroc Center of Memphis is gaining steam.

The local chapter of the Salvation Army, which will build the 100,000-square-foot facility on 15 acres at the fairgrounds, discovered this week that the matching funds they've been promised to build the center have increased by \$10 million.

The original deal was that if the Salvation Army could raise \$25 million, then \$50 million in funds – or \$2 for every dollar raised – would be donated from the estate of Joan Kroc, the late widow of McDonald's founder Ray Kroc and the woman who bequeathed \$1.5 billion to the Salvation Army when she died in 2003.

That meant funding for Memphis was set at \$75 million, but the amount increased this week, said Kroc Center director [Steve Carpenter](#). The Kroc Center project has been bumped up to \$85 million without the need for the local funding to total more than \$25 million.

Fundraising is nearly complete, with \$21.1 million toward the campaign goal of \$25 million already raised.

The extra money will aid in the construction and endowment of the center, which Carpenter said will be an “anchor” for the fairgrounds redevelopment, situated on the southeast corner of Central Avenue and East Parkway. He added that momentum for the Kroc Center remains strong while development for the rest of the fairgrounds struggles under the weight of the economy.

“It's the only part that's been moving forward,” Carpenter said.

Focal point

The Kroc Center took another step forward this week with the launch of its “Come Together” campaign to inform the public of what the project will mean for the city and its residents. The Kroc Center was the vision of Joan Kroc, who wanted to bring community centers to urban locales throughout the country, each one touching multiple neighborhoods in the cities they called home.

Billed as a “recreation, education, worship and cultural arts facility,” the Kroc Center will



CLOSER TO REALITY: The 100,000-square foot Kroc Center will rise on 15 acres at the Mid-South Fairgrounds once the fundraising goal of \$25 million is met. -- RENDERING COURTESY OF TRO JUNG | BRANNEN

have worship and fitness areas, soccer fields and basketball courts, meeting rooms and classrooms.

“It will be a place where people from all walks of life come to play, share and learn together. A place where relationships are built, boundaries are erased and lives are improved,” according to the center’s literature.

The Mid-South Fairgrounds’ central location – near the Beltline, Cooper-Young, Orange Mound, Buntyn, Central Gardens, Chickasaw Gardens, Binghampton and even Vollentine-Evergreen neighborhoods – met all the needs for a location.

“It will be a place where people can come together,” Carpenter said. “It’s a perfect time and a perfect place at the fairgrounds.”

Carpenter admitted that “In a different economic climate, it would be under construction,” but he is pleased that the project is debt-free and will be fully funded once construction begins. Mostly, though, he is pleased that a place like this is closer to becoming a reality.

“It’s important for people’s lives to get this done,” Carpenter said.

Green possibilities

Construction documents will be completed in July, and the project will be put out to bid after that. Carpenter said the Kroc Center will invite general contractors “we feel are acceptable” to submit bids.

Once a contractor is selected, the hope is to break ground in September or October. Site work is beginning as crews tear up asphalt and concrete. The construction fence is up, and two buildings on the 15-acre site have been razed – a Quonset hut storage shed and a standalone restroom facility.

TRO Jung | Brannen and Fleming/Associates/Architects PC are the architects; Ritchie Smith Associates is the landscaper; [Goodwin and Marshall Inc.](#) is the engineer; [Chandler Demolition Co. Inc.](#) is handling demolition; and [Flintco Inc.](#) is serving as a preconstruction contractor consultant.

The building will be environmentally sensitive, with the goal of achieving LEED (Leadership in Energy and [Environmental Design](#)) silver certification. Green features include the use of recycled concrete, local materials to reduce the energy needed to haul them to the site and a cistern to collect rainwater for irrigation.

Also, the site design and placement calls for saving as many trees on the site as possible and placing the indoor swimming pool on the south side of the facility to take advantage of natural light. The builders will use eco-friendly building principles such as extra insulation that keeps operating costs low. An area inside the Kroc Center will be dedicated to teaching visitors about the building’s environmental features.

The Kroc Center will employ 35 people once it is fully operational, and a trio of companies

will also have staff inside the facility: Memphis Athletic Ministries, Urban Youth Initiative and the C.R.O.S.S. Fire Commandos.

Marketing strategies

[Kerry Hayes](#) is project manager at carpenter | sullivan | sossaman (CS2), the agency of record for the Kroc Center project. ([Steve Carpenter](#) is the brother of CS2 principal Doug Carpenter; however, [Steve Carpenter](#) said he was not involved with agency selection.)

Hayes, a resident of Cooper-Young, said he is happy as a neighbor and as a Memphian to have something positive happen on the nearby fairgrounds property, calling it a “big project that is going to do all the things it says it’s going to do,” Hayes said.

His mission of late has been reaching out to churches, neighborhood groups and other community organizations to spread the word of the Kroc Center.

Calling those efforts “grass roots” and “old fashioned,” Hayes also is putting a new twist on marketing. The Kroc Center has a Web site (www.krocmemphis.org) plus Twitter and Facebook accounts. The social networking angle has been well received, Hayes said.

“It fits the project and the campaign so well,” he said. “Before you know it, you have 350 friends who are fans of it and we haven’t even put a shovel in the ground.”

That new media campaign complements the traditional methods of marketing, from television ads to billboards to small signs that homeowners can place in their yards or business owners can place in their office windows.

Now that the fundraising campaign is in the “final lap,” the people behind making the Kroc Center a reality are champing at the bit to pull in that final \$3.9 million, a task they find rewarding as the last dollars come in.

“When you get to this point of the campaign,” Hayes said, “you really start to see every penny count.”