

# It's 'full steam ahead' for construction of \$21 million Kroc Center project

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The Salvation Army Memphis has selected Montgomery Martin Contractors LLC to build the \$21 million, 100,000-square-foot Kroc Center of Memphis at the Mid-South Fairgrounds, a solid step toward a late February groundbreaking and the end of a challenging pre-development process.

"It's been great after all the neighborhood meetings and focus groups, to be able to meet again with people and show them how we're doing what they want," says Stephen Carpenter, director of operations for the Kroc Center.

Before starting work with the Kroc Center in 2006, Carpenter had helped co-found New Hope Christian Academy and served as headmaster for 10 years.

The site, which covers 15 acres fronting East Parkway and runs from Fairview Middle School to the Fairgrounds entrance, has been cleared of asphalt.

Construction is expected to take 16 months with a target completion date of July 2011.

"We're just full steam ahead," Carpenter says.

The overarching project includes the building and an endowment. In 2005, Memphis was selected as one of 25 cities to receive a matching gift from the Ray & Joan Kroc Trust. The trust will donate \$60 million to the project. It initially was going to donate \$50 million after \$25 million in private funds were raised, but kicked in an extra \$10 million due to the site location and demographics.

The Kroc Foundation wanted these centers put in places surrounded by various economic and racial groups. There are currently 25 Kroc Centers in various stages across the country, from fundraising to breaking ground. A small center in Atlanta opened last year and two centers in Greenville, S.C. and Augusta, Ga., are at about the same stage as the Memphis one.

The Memphis center will be within walking distance to residents in Orange Mound, Vollenline-Evergreen, Cooper-Young, Beltline and Chickasaw Gardens.

"For us, you can't get any better than the Fairgrounds," Carpenter says.

The project's land and building costs will total \$30 million, leaving \$55 million in the endowment for programming and events. Carpenter expects the endowment to have a long life since the nonprofit Salvation Army is fiscally conservative.

TRO Jung | Brannen and Fleming/Associates/Architects PC partnered on designing the Kroc Center. TRO was responsible for most of the exterior design and site work; Fleming handled

most of the interior design. Ritchie Smith Architects is handling landscape architecture, while Flintco, Inc., was involved in some pre-construction work.

Brett Ragsdale, senior associate with TRO Jung | Brannen, says one design challenge came from the building site facing the large educational buildings of Christian Brothers University to the north and smaller residential structures to the west.

“We wanted to be contextual and to do that, we had some large masses which relate to the schools, but we tried to break it down to the scale of the houses across the street, using red brick to relate to residential across the street,” he says.

Also, figuring out how to configure the building was challenging, since the Fairgrounds’ future is in a state of flux, especially land to the south and east of the Kroc Center.

Initially, the Salvation Army thought it was going to receive 25 acres from local government, but that was scaled back to 15 acres when it was determined it would have to purchase the land from the government.

“That challenged us because we couldn’t really cut a lot of programs or space, so we had to try and fit everything on a 15-acre site,” Ragsdale says. “We also didn’t know what was going on around us.”

The Kroc Center will be built for four main components: arts, education, recreation and worship.

“That’s true for every Kroc Center under way across the country,” Carpenter says. “But how those are defined depends on the individual community.”

It will have a 300-seat auditorium that can function as a chapel or theater.

Carpenter anticipates that local groups like New Ballet Ensemble in the nearby Cooper-Young neighborhood can use the space.

“We want to be a place which can help build up things in the community,” he says. “Whether it’s a performing arts group which needs a stage or an after-school program which needs a place to schedule regular meetings, we want to help.”

The Kroc Center will also have an indoor aquatic center with full-size pool, two-story water slide, a lazy river and whirlpool. There will also be an outdoor splash park.

These areas can be used for water aerobics, swimming classes and general recreation.

In addition to an NBA-quality basketball court and two NCAA-regulation sized soccer fields, the facility will have a fitness center with weight training and cardiovascular equipment, including a three-story multi-challenge activity area with ropes courses and other elements for teambuilding events.

The Kroc Center will host educational events from Christian Brothers University and other organizations in its classrooms.

While the project has a lot of different parts, Richard Meena, vice president of pre-construction for Montgomery Martin, says the firm is up to the challenge.

“We do a lot of projects like this which are educational and community-based,” Meena says. The Salvation Army has dictated that all Kroc Centers will be silver LEED certified.

The design will use techniques to decrease water runoff from the Kroc Center property, collecting roof water in underground cisterns and reusing it for irrigation and to flush urinals and toilets.

Green islands in the 302-space parking lot will be sunken so that water is retained for longer periods of time.

There will also be preferred parking for car-poolers and bike racks to encourage bike riding.

“That’s gotten to be the norm now,” Meena says. “It will have those LEED components which will help the owner with those utilities.”

General membership is free to the Kroc Center, which allows people into the multi-challenge area and basketball court.

A full-access membership would cost a maximum of \$25 a month per person.

The Salvation Army will be hiring about 30 people over the next year.

It will have annual budget of \$2 million, which includes salaries for more than 100 part-time and season staff, utilities and program costs.

Robert Lipscomb, the city’s chief financial officer, says the Kroc Center will be a great fit on East Parkway.

The city has been demolishing Libertyland and will soon be grading it and planting grass.

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“Now, instead of having all that embarrassment along East Parkway from Southern all the way to the Fairgrounds entrance, you’re going to have a green area which has been cleaned up,” Lipscomb says. Lipscomb and city consultants have held almost 40 meetings with city council members, property owners and community leaders around the Fairgrounds.

“We really wanted to meet with neighborhood leaders as opposed to the full groups because we really wanted people to be candid,” Lipscomb says. “A lot of times when you’re in a big meeting, people don’t feel they can be candid. We wanted a smaller venue so that if people wanted to criticize, they could criticize.”

He says a plan will be presented to Memphis Mayor A C Wharton in the coming months followed by larger meetings on the overall project.

In 2008, a Fairground re-use committee selected the Henry Turley-led Fair Ground LLC team as the preferred developer to redevelop the Fairgrounds.

In September 2009, Mayor Pro Tem Myron Lowery wrote a letter to Turley stating the city intended to move forward on its own.