

# Day center for homeless clears major hurdle

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SANTA CRUZ — A day-time resource center where homeless people can bathe, wash clothes, receive mail and get counseling has cleared its last major hurdle and is slated to open later this year.

The Homeless Community Resource Center, at 115-117 Coral St. near Harvey West Park, is expected to serve as many as 200 homeless people a day.

The center closed escrow Wednesday afternoon on a half-acre parcel in the city that includes two buildings totaling 9,500 square feet.

A former residence on the property will be used for counseling and meeting space; nearby auto-repair bays will be turned into a service center with storage lockers, a

nightly meal, and laundry, shower and toilet facilities.

The purchase price was \$700,000, with funds coming from a combination of city, county and state funds, and bond financing.

The facility is heralded by its supporters as a unique public-private partnership that will help homeless people get off the streets. They also hope that a central resource center will offer homeless people an alternative to loitering in the city's downtown commercial district.

"It's an attempt at a solution rather than closing one's eyes and hoping the homeless will go away," said Harriet Deck, a community activist and real estate agent who donated her time to consummate the purchase.

Judy Schwartz, a senior program ana-

lyst for the county's Human Resources Agency, said the center is one of a handful of its kind in the country, and part of a new wave in social-service thinking.

"For a long time, we focused only on giving people a place to sleep for the night, out of the elements," said "This is sort of the next step beyond that — meeting some of their primary needs. It's really an important step beyond just providing people with a place to sleep and a meal and I think it's likely to make a big difference in a lot of people's lives," said Schwartz.

The center's advisory board includes social-service providers, members of the homeless community and several prominent business leaders. Such diverse community support, said Schwartz, is "unprecedented in the history of homeless politics."

Board member and Downtown Association director Pat Calvert said she is "greatly encouraged" by the support the program is receiving from business owners.

"I see (the day center) as another step in trying to resolve some problems we have here and do it in a healthy fashion and with dignity," said Calvert.

Deck said the county plans to lease the property to the city and Housing for Independent People, a San Jose-based non-profit housing corporation, who in turn will sublet to the day center. Operating budget for the first full fiscal year will be an estimated \$150,000, with money coming from local, state and government sources, and private donations.

Karen Gillette, director of the successful Free Meal food-service program for the homeless, will serve as the center director.

with a staff of six homeless or formerly homeless. Counseling and referrals will be provided by existing government and non-profit agencies. The Free Meal program, which feeds upwards of 200 people a day, will be folded into the day center, said Gillette.

The county's homeless population, estimated by service providers to number as many as 3,000 people, is "excited" about having a place of their own, said Gillette. "And they're also impatient, because with the rainy weather it would really be nice to have it now," she said.

The center will be open roughly from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m., and alcohol and drug use will be strictly forbidden.

The day center was identified as a social-service goal in two county Human Resource Agency reports.