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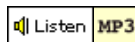
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Local Education Center Wins Grant, Moves Forward

Host: Victor Locke



The old Federal Building in Downtown Durango will soon be "The Commons" hosting at least ten non-profits. (Photo: Victor Locke, KSUT)

buy, remodel and lease out the building, which is now known as The Commons. Education Center Director Paulette Church says despite its age, the building has a lot of life left. CHURCH: IT'S PRE-STRESSED CONCRETE SO IT'S AN INCREDIBLY STABLE BUILDING, IT'S IN EXCELLENT CONDITION. WE HAD AN ENGINEERING REPORT DONE ON IT BEFORE WE PURCHASED IT. IT HAS NINE INCH THICK CONCRETE FLOORS, SIXTEEN INCH CONCRETE WALLS, SO IT'S VERY EASY TO BUILD IT BACK INTO SOME OF THE GREEN STANDARDS THAT WE'D LIKE TO MEET TODAY.

But it will take some remodeling.

CHURCH: AS AN OFFICE BUILDING IT WAS CARVED UP INTO A LOT OF SMALL OFFICE SPACES. AND FOR THE CONSERVATION CORP AND FOR THE EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS HERE WE NEED LARGER CLASSROOM SPACES. SO THERE'S QUITE A BIT OF WORK, SEVERAL MONTHS WORTH OF REMODELING THAT NEEDS TO BE DONE ON THE INSIDE OF THE BUILDING TO CONFIGURE IT AND BRING THE TECHNOLOGY THAT WE NEED IN AS WELL.

Church also hopes to give the buildings exterior a facelift, and even outfit the all electric building, with Photovoltaic Solar Cells to produce some of it's own electricity.

Late last week, the Institute was awarded a 200-thousand dollar grant from the Gates Family Foundation of Colorado putting them past the 75 percent mark in a campaign to raise 2-million dollars for remodeling.

They expect to hear, perhaps this week, that a USDA low interest loan for 4.5-million dollars has been approved.

That will provide long term financing of the nearly \$5-million dollar purchase price.

The loan will be paid off from rents paid by the ten not for profits which have already committed to occupy the building.

One of those is the Southwest Youth Conservation Corp, which serves 400 youth.

Director Harry Bruel jumped at the opportunity to form the Institute with Church as a way to keep his program in Durango.

BRUEL: THE WAY REAL ESTATE HAS BEEN GOING IN THIS COMMUNITY, WE'RE AT THE POINT OF BEING PRICED OUT. WE COULDN'T FIND ANOTHER PLACE THAT HAD PARKING, THAT HAD SIZE, THAT WE COULD AFFORD, SO WE WERE GOING TO BE MOVING SOMEWHERE ELSE, AND TAKING THE SERVICES OUT OF DURANGO. AND SO THIS ALLOWS US TO STAY HERE FOR THE LONG TERM, THE 40-YEARS OR MORE.

DURANGO, CO (2007-06-18) HOST LEAD: Efforts to save an aging downtown Durango building, and turn it into a "first of its kind" educational facility are moving forward. KSUT's Victor Locke reports.

VICTOR: It's not real obvious right now, but the old Federal Building at 701 South Camino Del Rio is undergoing a renaissance.

The 45-thousand square foot three story building, constructed in 1977, has been purchased from a local businessman by a new group, The Southwest Institute for Education and Conservation.

It's a joint non-profit formed by the Durango Adult Education Center and the Southwest Conservation Corps, to

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Robert Harrington is President of the Adult Education Center Board. He says once they move in this August, the center will be able to serve more than the 700 students it presently helps in obtaining their GED.

HARRINGTON: WE HAVE NOT BEEN ABLE TO GROW IN THE PAST BECAUSE SPACE HAS BEEN LIMITED. WE'LL BE ABLE TO MEET OUR CURRENT NEEDS AND WE'LL BE ABLE TO GROW.

Pueblo Community College will also continue to occupy space, in fact they've already moved into some remodeled areas.

Dan May, PCC's Southwest Campus Dean says their presence, and the presence of Fort Lewis College, The University of Denver and others in the building, will make it easier for Adult Education Center Graduates to continue their education.

MAY: IT'S A NEW PARADIGM, RATHER THAN SENDING PEOPLE ALL OVER TOWN, YOU GET SERVICE A THERE, THEN SERVICE B, IT WILL ALL BE CO-LOCATED AND IT'S A NEW APPROACH TO PARTNERSHIP TO MAKE SERVICES AVAILABLE TO PEOPLE IN ONE LOCATION THAT ARE ACCESSIBLE AND AFFORDABLE.

Church says The Commons ultimately could become a national demonstration site for the co-location of educational services.

CHURCH: THERE HAS BEEN A MOVEMENT THE LAST FOUR YEARS FOR WHAT ARE CALLED MULTI TENANT NON PROFIT BUILDINGS, IT'S A FAIRLY RECENT IDEA. WE'RE THE FIRST ONE CENTERED ON EDUCATION IN THE COUNTRY, SO IT'S VERY UNIQUE THAT WAY. IT'S THE FIRST ONE AT ALL IN COLORADO, WHERE WE'RE BRINGING EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES AND NON PROFITS TOGETHER. SO IT'S A FAIRLY NEW IDEA BUT ONE THAT IS QUICKLY GROWING.

You can find out more about The Commons, on line, at DurangoCommons.org.

From KSUT, Four Corners Public Radio, I'm Victor Locke.

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