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EDUCARE CENTER PLANNED FOR SOUTH OKLAHOMA CITY

Inasmuch Foundation leads funding efforts to bring early-childhood development facility to city

OKLAHOMA CITY – A collaboration of Oklahomans is bringing the innovative Educare education model to Oklahoma City. Located at Byers Avenue and Southeast Grand Boulevard, Oklahoma City Educare is scheduled to open in 2009. This is the sixth center of its kind in the nation and second in the state. It is also the first Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED)-certified Educare facility in the nation.

For the past year, Inasmuch Foundation has been leading the funding and partnering efforts to bring an Educare Center to Oklahoma City.

“Our funding, management and building approach is unique for a project of this size,” said Bob Ross, president and CEO of Inasmuch Foundation and chairman of Oklahoma City Educare. “The response has been overwhelming and encouraging.”

Oklahoma City Educare will serve 200 at-risk children, prenatal to five years old, with year-round educational programs and developmental childcare. In addition to serving children enrolled in the program, family support staff will also ensure that pregnant women and newborns receive health services. Educare’s programs and principles are based on research that shows low-income children gain a dramatically greater opportunity for emotional, social, financial and cognitive success if they are provided with educational opportunities at an early age. This makes focused attention on the earliest years the wisest investment with the greatest potential for return, both for the children and for society at large.

“Children are born learning,” said Dan Pedersen, president of the Buffett Early Childhood Fund, an Omaha-based foundation working with Educare efforts across America. “Science shows the student achievement gap is rooted in the first five years of life so it makes sense that we invest in those early years to achieve the greatest returns.”

Oklahoma City Educare is made possible by a private-public partnership. Private donations from various individuals and foundations are funding the construction, and Sunbeam Family Services Inc. will manage the center’s day-to-day operations upon completion. The estimated \$10.5 million capital budget includes an endowment that will help fund future building maintenance and other unforeseen costs.

“By offering our youngest citizens a helping hand when they need it most, Educare can put children on the right track to a successful life,” said Gov. Brad Henry. “I applaud the Inasmuch Foundation and its partners for their support of this visionary project. The investment they make in our children today will pay dividends for many years to come.”

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Gov. Henry, along with state and local officials, business leaders and educators, will participate in a groundbreaking ceremony Nov. 5 at 10 a.m. at the building site.

“No other early childhood education centers that I’ve previously encountered have held the promise that I see in Educare,” said Ray Bitsche, executive director of Sunbeam Family Services. “I am especially confident that their research-based strategies will help Oklahoma’s children succeed in school and, ultimately, life.”

Partners in the Oklahoma City project include Inasmuch Foundation, Sunbeam Family Services Inc., Community Action Agency and Oklahoma City Public Schools. Founding donors include Inasmuch Foundation, George Kaiser Family Foundation, Aubrey and Katie McClendon, Tom and Sch’ree Ward, Buffett Early Childhood Fund, E.L. and Thelma Gaylord Foundation, Potts Family Foundation, The Garrett Family through Garrett and Company LLC, George and Nancy Records, Kirkpatrick Family Fund and Donald W. Reynolds Foundation.

Oklahoma City Educare is being built in conjunction with Cesar Chavez Elementary, a new MAPS for Kids school.

“With the creation of a campus that will serve children birth to sixth grade, Oklahoma City Public Schools will have helped plan and construct a one-of-a-kind grouping of facilities and programs that will have a profound impact on many patrons of our school district and, hopefully, develop a model for expansion,” said Cliff Hudson, chairman and CEO of Sonic Industries, Inc. and chairman of Oklahoma City Public Schools.

Upon the Oklahoma City center’s completion, Oklahoma will become the only state with two cities that have Educare Centers. An Educare Center opened in Tulsa in August 2006 with support from George Kaiser Family Foundation, an organization committed to early intervention in the cycle of poverty.

“America has always stood for equal opportunity. Yet, at birth, many of our children are condemned to a life of disadvantage,” George Kaiser said. “Through programs like Educare, which provide very young children with constructive sensory stimulation in a warm, nurturing environment, we are fulfilling our moral obligation to give them an opportunity to succeed beyond the circumstance of their birth. This new center will extend Oklahoma’s national reputation for leadership in Early Childhood Education.”

About Educare

Founded by the Ounce of Prevention Fund in Chicago in 2000, Educare Centers are committed to helping young children grow up safe, healthy and eager to learn. Through a consortium of partners, Educare supporters create, provide and promote the highest quality outcome-based learning environments for families and their children (ages prenatal to five years) who are at-risk for school failure. Educare principles and practices are based on continual research and implementation within the field of early childhood education. The success of the children who enter this program will demonstrate the societal and economic value of investing in the earliest years in order to prevent the need for costly interventions later.

Nationwide Educare Centers include:

- Chicago – opened 2000
- Omaha (North), Neb. – opened 2003
- Milwaukee – opened 2005
- Tulsa – opened 2006
- Denver – opened 2007
- Oklahoma City – groundbreaking 2007
- Omaha (South), Neb. – groundbreaking 2008

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