

New preschool set to open in Fountain



The demographics of Fountain tell the story. In 2000, the town's population was about 15,600. Today, it's near 28,000 and growing.

Young couples with children continue to be drawn to the community, and they tend to earn a median household income \$3,000 lower than families who live in Colorado Springs.

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Precisely the reason for a new \$7.5 million preschool opening next week in Fountain-Fort Carson School District 8 for low-income and at-risk children.

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The Conrad Early Learning Center, named for Yevonne Conrad, a longtime early childhood educator in D-8 who helped develop the preschool program, will be dedicated at 5 p.m. Thursday.

School starts next Tuesday for about 250 youngsters ages 3-to-5 years-old.

"We're excited about expanding early intervention services with a state-of-the-art facility," said Montina Romero, the district's director of exceptional student services.

The preschool, at 10605 Jimmy Camp Road, is north of the district administration building on what used to be an empty lot.

Construction started a year ago on the 33,000-square-foot steel framed, brick veneer building designed by CRP Architects of Colorado Springs.

Romero said crews from Art C. Klein Construction lost 49 days of work due to rainy weather over the past year. Nonetheless, she said, they met the goal of finishing in time for this school year.

Impact Aid funds - federal money available to districts with schools on military property - helped pay for the building. A good chunk of D-8 sits on Fort Carson, although the new preschool does not.

D-8 will operate six classrooms with 200 students, Romero said, under the state-funded Colorado Preschool Program. Children who have risk factors associated with later challenges in school are eligible for the program, which is free to qualifying families.

The state-supplied curriculum is solid and starts youngsters out on a path to transition easily to kindergarten, Romero said.

"This center will provide more access to quality education and enhance students' abilities to be successful in elementary school," she said.

Community Partnership for Child Development, which runs the local Head Start program, will provide three additional classrooms. One will be an infant and toddler room for ages newborn to 3, the other two will have the Head Start program for 4- and 5-year-olds.

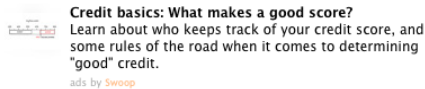
One of the Head Start classes will feature a new six-hour "extended day" format, said Noreen Landis-Tyson, CEO and president of CPCD.

Head Start is designed for low-income parents and includes family support to meet emotional, social, health, nutritional and psychological needs.

The Head Start classes each will have 25 students, and the infant and toddler room can accommodate eight children. CPCD also operates five classrooms on Fort Carson.

"We are thrilled to finally have the space to give our District 8 families more access to the program," Landis-Tyson said. "We can ensure these kiddos who likely have a challenge or two at home can be school-ready by the time they enter kindergarten."

The building's namesake is known as an advocate for young children in El Paso County. Conrad has retired and plans to volunteer at the new preschool, Romero said.



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"She's a selfless leader that has embraced this population, mentored teachers, advanced early literacy and contributed greatly to this community."



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