

Downtown shelter to open soon

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A shelter for Rapid City's homeless that drew fire from its downtown neighbors will open soon, and supporters of the shelter say they intend to make it a credit to the community.

"I think it really speaks very well for Rapid City," said Joe Rovere, chairman of the board of directors for Community Care Center Inc. "In fact, I would encourage anyone that is showing a prospective industrial customer that might locate here, or showing tourists around or anyone else, I would encourage them to include this as part of their tour. I think everyone is going to be impressed."

The Community Care Center at 30 Main St. (formerly City Hall) will hold an open house this weekend. The renovated building will bring four agencies that serve the homeless and needy under one roof: the Salvation Army feeding program, Church Response, Cornerstone Rescue Mission and Black Hills Regional Food Bank.

A ribbon-cutting ceremony will be at noon Saturday with an open house until 3 p.m. The building will be open again Sunday from noon until 3 p.m.

When Community Care Center Inc. proposed buying the building last year and turning it into a shelter, some nearby property owners were outraged. They feared

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mission residents would scare away their customers, threaten their employees and hurt downtown property values.

But Rovere said the mission and the other agencies in the building were "under pressure to perform correctly." And he said Community Care Center Inc., which owns the building, asked several opponents of locating the shelter downtown to serve on an advisory board to help with problems that might arise. All who were asked accepted without hesitation, he said.

"I don't think they're convinced yet" about locating the shelter downtown, Rovere said. "But I think they're honest when they say they're willing to give it a try. And from talking to the five people we have on that advisory board, ... they're going to make every effort to help make it work, even though I wouldn't say they're happy about it being located here."

Bryan Schnell, redevelopment director for the Downtown Development Corp., said one nearby business owner had moved because of the shelter and that other downtown merchants still feared the shelter would hurt their businesses.

"It's my hope and I know the hope of the (Community Care Center Inc.) board of directors to extinguish those fears," Schnell said. After touring the shelter Thursday, Schnell said he was impressed with the renovation.

Persons who come to the shelter can get hot meals, a place to stay, groceries, medical checkups and referrals, mental health screenings and job training classes.

Behind the building a small playground and park are being con-

structed.

"These people that need these kinds of services really don't enjoy being looked at any more than some of the people like to look at those people," said Police Chief Tom Hennies, also a member of the Community Care Center board.

The Rev. Dave Adams, director of the Cornerstone Rescue Mission and a member of the Community Care Center Inc. board, said shelter residents would begin moving into the new building Monday. The present shelter is a metal building in Sioux Addition in North Rapid City. The Salvation Army feeding program also will begin Monday, Rovere said.

Adams said mission clients had done a lot of the renovation at the new center, much of it free of charge because there was no money to pay them.

"The one thing about this place is they feel it's their place," Adams said. "And the work they've been putting in here, they feel 'We've done the work, we helped get it going.'"

"This is far more than we ever prayed for," Gene Cameron, a Community Care Center board member, said of the new facility. "We've just got a great Lord."

The mission will remain open 24 hours a day and be supervised at all times, Adams said.

Hennies said police would begin extra patrols around the Community Care Center building "not because I see a need for it, but because some of the neighbors see a need for it. We want to be very visible."

Rovere said the care center received donations of all kinds from various businesses, groups and individuals.

Community Care Center Inc. has raised \$620,000 of the \$700,000 it needs to pay for the building and its renovation, Rovere said. The four agencies located there will continue to rely on public support to pay for their programs, he said.