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Mission Solano breaks ground, brings hope

Rain can't stop site dedication

By Tom Hall/Staff Writer

If nothing else, the dirt was plenty soft enough for the shovels.

Crews couldn't quite get working Thursday on the \$4.7 million first phase of the Mission Solano homeless center in Fairfield, thanks to a dreary winter storm.

A bright beacon of celebration still shone near the project site, though, as hundreds gathered for the birth of a permanent home for the local cause previously known as "the homeless homeless mission."

The rain falling on northern Solano County provided a reminder to those in attendance about why a comprehensive homeless shelter is so necessary.

"There's nothing like a little visual," said Tim Lefever, a Dixon lawyer and the chairman of Mission Solano's board.

The start of work at Beck Avenue and Cordelia Road in the Fairfield industrial park where the shelter will call home signifies an end to the long process of finding an acceptable place for the center.

But executive director Ron Marlette, bubbling with overwhelming enthusiasm, said his group isn't done moving forward yet.

"I'm already thinking about our next step," Marlette said. "We are continuing to move and continuing to work for those who are homeless and poverty-stricken."

The project's first phase, dubbed the "Bridge to Life Center," will be able to accommodate up to 100 women and children, providing not only shelter, but a comprehensive package of counseling services including job training, money management education and connection to public agencies which can further help the homeless.

Assemblywoman Lois Wolk, D-Solano, told those present that the fact the first phase already has been completely funded by a group of builders, the city of Fairfield and local businesses is a testament to the community support that exists for helping the homeless population.

"This is more than a groundbreaking," Wolk said. "This is a statement of who we are as a community."

Thursday's event also brought together folks of strikingly different political stripes. Lefever was once a Republican candidate for Congress. Gary Falati, who was Lefever's co-emcee Thursday, is a former Fairfield mayor and longtime ally of former Democratic Congressman Vic Fazio.

Outgoing Fairfield Mayor Karin MacMillan spoke at the event, as did Suisun City Mayor Jim Spering. The two will face each other this spring in a battle for a spot on the county Board of Supervisors.

Falati said ideological differences aside, everyone involved understands the magnitude of the problem facing Solano's impoverished.

"When the need exists, this community comes together," he said.

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