

Representatives of local, county and state agencies took part, Dec. 17 in a groundbreaking celebration at the site of the South Lebanon Early Learning Center, the first facility of its kind in Warren County.

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The Western-Star, Lebanon, Ohio
December 24, 2009

Christmas has come early for all who will receive the benefits of a state-of-the-art early learning and child care facility, the first of its kind in Warren County, under construction in South Lebanon.

Representatives of local, county and state agencies, community supporters, donors, and the public took part in a groundbreaking celebration for the South Lebanon Early Learning Center located on village-owned land near the intersections of Forest and Section streets.

The \$2.3 million facility will not only provide high-quality child care and educational services to children up to age 5, it will provide jobs and aid in the economic growth and development of the village and surrounding areas, said Larry Sargeant, executive director of Warren County Community Services.

Funding for the facility has come by way of many means, he said.

"Funding comes from grants from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, from the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and permanent financing will be provided by the United States Department of Agriculture Rural Development program. The construction financing is being provided by LCNB National Bank," Sargeant said. "The balance of the funding is contributions by private individuals, businesses and foundations."

Tony Logan, USDA Rural Development state director, said the low-interest loans and grants provided are job stimulus funds approved by Congress last February.

"This project gets personally reviewed by the secretary of agriculture. Our objective is to get out these projects into all areas of the state," Logan said. "And, such as the case here, get solid construction jobs to stimulate the local economy for the long-range, multi-generational purpose of creating a community facility for Head Start that will be here for generations."

The 15,000-square-foot, one-story with two-story central atrium facility will have six classrooms, specialized therapy and workrooms, a fully equipped kitchen and a spacious multi-purpose area for family and community activities.

According to Lisa Cayard, Warren County Community Services Early Learning centers director, the South Lebanon Early Learning Center will be a fully accredited full-day child care facility and will provide part day early childhood educational programs.

"The curriculum is designed to promote the social, emotional, cognitive and physical development of the children," she said. "Activities with a multi-cultural and multi-sensory approach promote younger children's readiness for school and help them later to achieve success."

Earlier this year, South Lebanon council approved a 55-year lease of the village's land to Warren County Community Services for the early learning center.

"I want to personally thank council for authorizing the land use for this project. And, with the South Lebanon Elementary school winning the coveted Blue Ribbon Award, it speaks volumes about just how much the community cares about education and the future of education," said South Lebanon Mayor James Smith. "With this model facility the sentiment will continue."