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PRESCHOOL FOR LOW-INCOME FAMILIES IS SET TO BREAK GROUND

BECCY TANNER, The Wichita Eagle

An early childhood learning center that opened in Oaklawn two years ago has been so successful another is in the works, for northeast Wichita.

Groundbreaking for the TOP TLC North Learning Center begins at 10 a.m. Wednesday at 2200 N. Jardine.

"It's similar to what we have down south," said Janice Suzanne Smith, the center's executive director. "It's to provide high-quality day care and preschool for low-income families."

Smith said the center will provide highly trained teachers and a literacy -based curriculum along with health and nutrition programs.

The schools use private funds in conjunction with public service organizations and educational institutions.

The program is a development of the Barry L. and Paula M. Downing Foundation. Partners include the city of Wichita, Boys & Girls Clubs, USD 259, Kansas Health Foundation, Wichita Community Foundation, Kansas Department of Commerce and Wichita State University.

Wichita public school superintendent Winston Brooks said the partnership benefits Wichita schools ..

"This is a good thing for us and a good thing for the community," he said. "The facility will be state-of-the-art. "

The city is providing land near 21 st and Jardine, between I-135 and Hillside, for the center.

Smith said the school will have eight classrooms for infants through school-age children.

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The new center will be 23,000 square feet and cost \$3 million. Enrollment will begin in August.

It would be among several projects the city has planned to help revitalize East 21st Street. Other projects include a new center for Boys & Girls Club of South Central Kansas and eventually a new elementary school.

The childhood learning center will be on land that was previously occupied by the Institute of Logopedics, later renamed Heartspring. In 1998, that institution moved to 8700 E. 29th St. North.

Brooks praised the Downings and Russ Meyer, who has helped lead efforts to revitalize 21st street.

"Both are fantastic community philanthropists," Brooks said. "This facility will serve under-served kids in a way that's never happened before."

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