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News

Breaking ground so the hungry can break bread

By Yadira Betances
Staff Writer*(single page view)*
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LAWRENCE — With the push of a lever, Joe Wilson used the bucket of his backhoe to break ground in the parking lot at Carver and Salem streets. Although Wilson has been doing excavation work since 1985, this is a special project.

The groundbreaking yesterday kicked off the construction of Cor Unum, a \$1.4 million food pantry and meal center sponsored by St. Patrick Parish. The name means "One Heart" in Latin.

Students from St. Patrick School, staff members and parishioners applauded as Wilson did his work.

"Please bless this site," said the Rev. Paul O'Brien, pastor of St. Patrick, in a jubilant tone.

O'Brien said in a short prayer: "Give us good weather so we can build as soon as possible."

It is hoped that by next summer, the lot now used for overflow church parking, will be home to Cor Unum.

Cor Unum will give South Lawrence residents a place to get nonperishable food to use at home or to eat a hot breakfast, lunch and dinner, seven days a week. The dining area will sit 75 people.

"It's fantastic," O'Brien said. "After four years of work, this is a very concrete start."

The ceremony was attended by seventh- and eighth-graders from St. Patrick School who are members of the St. Vincent dePaul youth group. For two years, the teenagers have collected nonperishable food such as pasta, tuna fish, spaghetti and peanut butter and jelly monthly in their classrooms.

"There was a need and I wanted the children to be aware,"

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said Sister Ann Hegarty, who leads the program with fellow Sisters Nancy Conlon and Ellen William.

Christine Schaffer, 13, sometimes uses her allowance or asks her parents for money to buy food for the collection.

"It makes me proud to make a contribution and being able to participate," said Schaffer of Atkinson, N.H., an eighth-grader at St. Patrick School.

Diane Jarvis has been named director of Cor Unum.

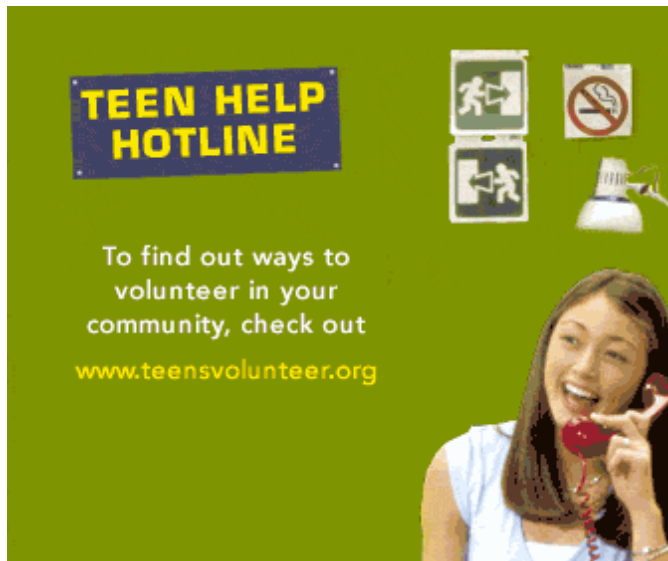
"It's an honor," Jarvis said. "There's nothing closer to my heart than working with children and the poor." Jarvis is also director of religious education at St. Patrick.

The 5,600-square-foot, one-story building will have a commercial kitchen along with utensils, ovens, and a working area brought from Sacred Heart Church in Lawrence, which closed earlier this year.

The Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Boston announced in August that it will donate all construction costs over \$900,000 for the building.

O'Brien said it will cost \$200,000 a year to operate Cor Unum, and that he hopes to raise \$400,000 by July for two years of operating costs.

O'Brien said the meal center is based on the same concept as other local soup kitchens that operate on donated food and volunteers.



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