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IFF and Grand Victoria Foundation Help Nonprofits Go 'Green' With Child Care Classroom Makeover Grants

Grantees Get Problems Solved, Plus Makeovers Will Employ Green Building Techniques for Added Economic, Social and Environmental Benefits

PEORIA—When a teacher at South Side Catholic Child Care Center asked her students to “name something red,” and a child in another room answered, “apple,” teachers couldn’t help but laugh. Yet they fretted knowing the noisy, makeshift basement classrooms inhibit youngsters’ abilities to focus and learn.

That’s why Kathie Raiborn at Rogy’s Gingerbread House, the agency managing South Side’s programs, is gushing about the makeovers three basement classrooms will receive. The makeovers are thanks to Fresh Spaces for Learning Places grants through the Building Blocks program, a joint initiative by the Illinois Facilities Fund and Grand Victoria Foundation to bring vital early care and education expertise to programs targeted at low-income families. At South Side, Fresh Spaces will provide a general cosmetic facelift with a focus on noise reduction, including installation of a new acoustic drop ceiling, sound absorption panels and closing gaps between rooms.

“We received a State grant last year to add pre-kindergarten programs at South Side, and were able to identify enough funds to buy partitions and create two additional classrooms in the basement,” said Ms. Raiborn. “But we couldn’t stretch any further to make the type of renovations needed to create optimal learning spaces. With this grant, we can.”

The YWCA of Peoria, another grantee, will have one of its classrooms converted for use as infant care, a program much needed in this agency’s area of service.

In addition to solving specific classroom challenges for each center, all of the makeovers will use green building techniques. Green—or sustainable—building is the practice of creating healthier and more resource-efficient models of construction, renovation, operation, maintenance, and demolition.

By choosing green carpet, lighting, paint, furniture and other materials, project architect Heidrun Hoppe knows the agencies will see economic and environmental benefits, while center staff and children will reap health and social benefits. For example, pediatric asthma is a particular public health concern in many communities. The American Lung Association estimates that 3,880 children in Peoria County are living with asthma. Many types of paints

and glues; new furnishings, especially those made of particle board and pressed wood; and space heaters and furnaces exacerbate asthma, which can be avoided using green materials.

“The IFF with the support Grand Victoria Foundation has completed Fresh Spaces classroom makeovers elsewhere in Illinois over the past three years, but I am particularly excited about these makeovers,” says Jacques Sandberg, director of community planning at IFF. “We are taking our mission to create improved learning environments for children a big step further by adding the many benefits of green building techniques.”

“Early childhood care and education and healthy environments have been steadfast priorities for the Grand Victoria Foundation,” says Nancy Fishman, executive director. “Improving classroom environments for children using a green approach is ideal; one that we look forward to replicating in other Illinois communities.”

In total, seven child care centers were awarded Fresh Spaces grants to makeover 20 classrooms, two indoor play areas, and a lobby:

- Children’s Center of Tazewell County, Creve Coeur
- Crittenton Centers, Peoria
- Neighborhood House, Peoria
- Peoria Citizens Committee for Economic Opportunity (PCCEO)
- South Side Catholic Child Care Center, Peoria
- YWCA Pekin
- YWCA Peoria

Work on the classrooms is expected to start later this summer with completion targeted for October.

About Grand Victoria Foundation (GVF)

GVF is a creative statewide philanthropic leader that funds efforts to promote systemic change in the areas of education, economic development and the environment. Established by the Grand Victoria Casino, which contributes 12.5 percent of its annual net profit to the foundation, GVF also provides technical assistance and expertise to nonprofits to promote their long-term success. To learn more about GVF, visit www.grandvictoriafdn.org or call 312.609.0200.

About Illinois Facilities Fund (IFF)

Founded in 1990 as a private nonprofit, the IFF is a statewide leader in building capacity for Illinois nonprofits—particularly in the field of child care—through research, community planning, capital financing, facilities planning and real estate development. To date, the IFF has made nearly 500 below-market loans to nearly 300 Illinois nonprofits and completed more than 160 nonprofit real estate construction or renovation projects. To learn more about IFF, consult www.iff.org or call 312.629.0060.

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