

VILLAGER

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Agreement paves way for 3,800 new homes on Ford site

\$53.5M in TIF will help pay for streets and utilities, more TIF is expected for affordable housing

By JANE McCLURE

Twelve years after Ford Motor Company first announced its intention to abandon its assembly plant in Highland Park, the St. Paul City Council on December 4 approved an agreement with master developer Ryan Companies to transform the now-vacant 122-acre tract with new housing, retail stores, offices and parks with the help of a complex public financing package that relies heavily on tax increment financing (TIF).

"We're here tonight with a plan that works," said Tony Barranco, senior vice president for development at Ryan Companies. The public financing will not only pay for such infrastructure as sewers, streets, parks and trails, Barranco said, it will preserve two of the three Highland Ball diamonds and support affordable housing projects citywide.

"When Ford Motor Company opened a sprawling auto manufacturing plant on the banks of the Mississippi (in 1926), it laid the foundation for nearly a century of opportunity and growth in our city," said Ward 3 City Council member Chris Tolbert. "I believe that today we're embarking on another once-in-a-century opportunity that will reap benefits for generations to come."

FORD SITE REDEVELOPMENT ▶ 3



Their eyes all aglow.

Kids delight in meeting Bubba the Bear at the Grand Meander on December 7 as part of a new Gather Here pop-up art event in the vacant lot at 1659 Grand Ave. At left, Rene Meyer-Grimberg, Breanna Everson and Jon Dahl sing around a bonfire at the site.

PHOTOS BY BRAD STAUFFER

Homeless families find a room at the Interfaith inn

Interfaith Action's Project Home is now serving 24/7

By LESLIE WALTERS

Shay Wilson and her four children lost their apartment when the building was sold. "I looked and looked for a place to live, but I couldn't find anything affordable on my disability checks," Wilson said. "I couldn't find a one-bedroom for under \$1,000 a month. Besides that, you can't have more than three people in a one-bedroom apartment."

Most homeless shelters only accept adults, so Wilson and her children spent a year living in her car. Then Ramsey County referred her to Project Home, the only homeless shelter in St.

Paul specifically for families. Wilson was relieved to find a warm place for her and her children to sleep with three nutritious meals a day, showers, lockers and personal hygiene products.

Project Home is a program of Interfaith Action of Greater St. Paul, 1671 Summit Ave. Interfaith Action coordinates the services of thousands of volunteers to address the effects of poverty. It partners with churches, synagogues and schools to provide two overnight shelters each month with a total of 40 beds. The families spend the day at the Project Home Day Center at First Baptist Church in downtown St. Paul.

The day center had been operated by the Family Place since 2001, according to Sara Liegl, director of Project Home. However, the Family Place ceased operations in late August when it lost much of its funding, she said. With less than

two weeks' notice and a new school year about to start, Interfaith Action took over the Day Center through the end of 2019 with a \$175,000 grant from Ramsey County.

The Ramsey County Board recently awarded Interfaith Action another \$600,000 to operate Project Home Day Center through the end of 2020 with an option to renew the grant annually through 2024. "We saw a real need to help this underserved population," said Ramsey County commissioner Trista MatasCastillo. "We can't very well leave a mother and an 8-month-old baby out in the cold."

The Day Center shelters families in all their various forms. "We have traditional parents, single moms and dads, grandmothers and same-

PROJECT HOME ▶ 5

— JANUARY 2020 ADMISSION EVENTS: PLEASE JOIN US! —



ST. PAUL ACADEMY AND SUMMIT SCHOOL

Lower School Open House (K-5)

1150 Goodrich Avenue, St. Paul

Tuesday, January 14, 2020, 8:30-10:30 a.m.

Middle and Upper School Open House (6-12)

1712 Randolph Avenue, St. Paul

Thursday, January 16, 2020, 6:30-8:30 p.m.

For more information please visit www.spa.edu/Admission or call 651-698-2451.



Seven-month-old Christian enjoys time with his mother (who did not want to give her name) in the family room of the Project Home Day Center. PHOTOS BY BRAD STAUFFER

1 ◀ PROJECT HOME

gender parents,” Liegl said. Some parents have outside jobs, and the older children attend school on weekdays. Others remain at the center throughout the day.

Project Home’s goal is to provide families with basic needs, giving them time and support to find jobs and more stable housing, Liegl said. The average stay for a family is 67 days, although “one family last year sheltered with us for 11 months before finding permanent supportive housing,” she said. “Case management is the linchpin of moving families forward and out of here.”

Upon entering the program, parents at Project Home develop a plan and budget for their family. A case manager helps them secure a valid picture ID, birth certificates and a Social Security card and compile information about disabilities and any chemical dependency and mental health issues. “We also look at sources of income, Social Security, disability and child support payments and the Minnesota Family Investment Program,” Liegl said.

Project Home collects their clients’ monthly income and uses the money to help the families pay their bills. Budgeting is key to a successful plan, according to Project Home program manager Barbara Hunt. The parents are given a stipend to use for other expenses. “If they can increase their income, we can work with them and usually get them in below-market-rate housing,” Hunt said.

At 4 p.m. on a recent Friday, the commotion at the Day Center built as the older children got off the bus from school. Families who had made progress on their plans and budgets were awarded weekend passes to visit family and friends. Others gathered in the family room, enjoying conversation, toys, videos and the festive Christmas tree.

Some parents were still at their day jobs and not due back until dinner time. Later, the families would be bused to the two overnight shelters. The overnight shelters are rotated among 23 churches, synagogues and schools. The shelters are staffed by volunteers with the

“I just take it one day at a time. It’s been seven months and I’m getting closer and closer to my house. It beats being on the street with my two kids.”

support of Project Home. Parents interviewed at the Day Center were all grateful to have a warm place to stay, but they had mixed reactions to the case management services and their prospects for finding a permanent home.

“I’m hopeful for (subsidized) housing,” Shay Wilson said. “It’s the only way I can save money. Without it, what’s the point? I’d be here forever.”

“I’m not sure if (Project Home) has the resources I need,” said Marsha, who declined to give her last name. Marsha has been at the shelter for three months. “It’s helpful if you need services like advocacy, which can be a barrier,” she said. “But my monthly stipend is only \$100. What’s that for a family of three?”

“I just take it one day at a time,” said Crystal, a single mother who would not give her last name. “It’s been seven months and I’m getting closer and closer to my house. It beats being on the street with my two kids.”

Project Home served a total of 59 families in 2018—139 children and 70 adults, according to Liegl. “This year, with one month to go, we’ve already served 62 families—149 children and 70 adults,” she said.

Catholic Charities operates the Family Service Center in Maplewood, the only other day and overnight shelter for homeless families in Ramsey County. It has a total of 65 beds. However, there are more than 60 other families in Ramsey County who are without shelter and on a waiting list, according to Liegl.

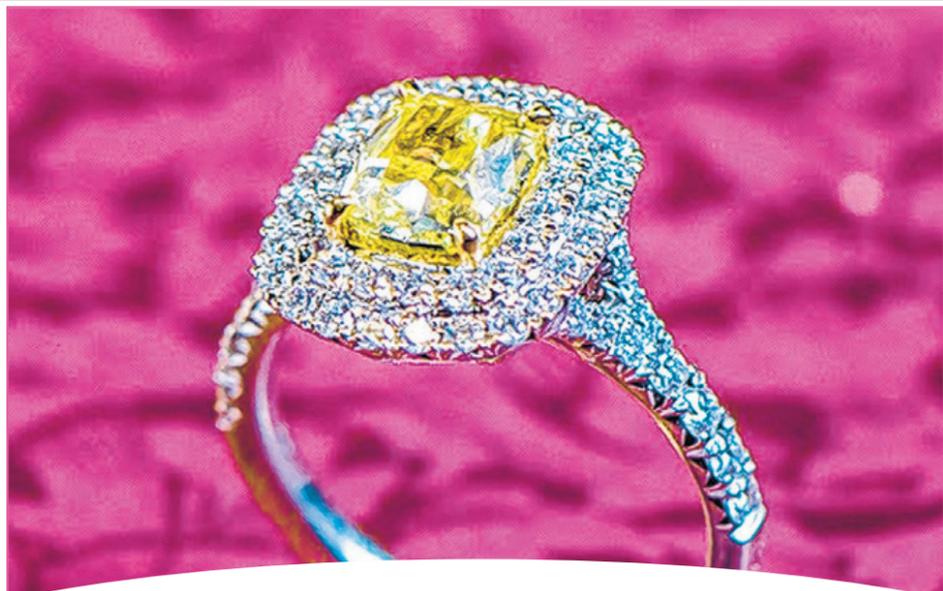
“Project Home is unique because we provide aftercare once our clients are settled (in a permanent home),” Liegl said. “The families know they have a safety net that will help them maintain their new housing.”

“The new Project Home Day Center helps Interfaith Action live out its mission more fully, helping families increase their economic mobility, often helping them move out of deep poverty,” said Interfaith Action executive director Randi Ilyse Roth. “It gives us more opportunities to involve volunteers from the faith community in making an impact on the lives of families in need.”

For more information about volunteering with Project Home, visit interfaithaction.org.



Lavender Gail, 10, and brother Kevin, 4, play a board game with advocate Debbie Barr at the Project Home Day Center.



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