

Church dedicates new child care center

St. Andrew building a tribute to member

By Jane Roberts

Wednesday, June 6, 2012

With the press of humidity and its own expectations, St. Andrew AME dedicated its \$1.1 million child care center in South Memphis on Tuesday, memorializing a deceased church member who started the effort five decades ago.

The Ernestine Rivers Childcare Center, a white clapboard building with shining blue roof, sits beside Interstate 240 for a reason, Rev. Kenneth Robinson told the crowd.

"This reflects what is occurring in South Memphis. We want everyone driving by to see it," he said.

The building, funded with \$600,000 from the Assisi Foundation and \$500,000 from the Hyde Family Foundations, allows the day care -- an institution in the neighborhood since 1961 -- to expand outside the church, where Circles of Success charter school is waiting for the space.

By fall, Circles of Success will have a new library, a teacher resource area, plus room for 40 new students, including double-kindergarten capacity.

"This is the fun part of what we all do," J.R. "Pitt" Hyde told the crowd seated on the freshly striped new asphalt parking lot, noting the "amazing" progress the neighborhood has made.

"You have a strong church, a strong school and a strong day care for the youngest of the young," he said.

"Each of these things is a building block, and do everything to assure that you have well-raised, well-educated children."

The center, which will serve 120 children, a 40 percent increase, has a triple-star rating from the state. It also is accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children. It offers pre-kindergarten through collaboration with Memphis City Schools.

Children may enroll at age 12 months. The state offers child care vouchers to eligible families.

The net effect, Robinson said, is that most of the children who enroll as infants stay in the St. Andrew pipeline through fifth grade when they graduate from Circles of Success, one of the first three charter schools to open in Memphis.

"This takes us to full enrollment," Robinson said. "My vision was a K-5 with small classes and teacher-pupil ration of 1-to-10. Small, intense, high-quality pedagogy -- that has been our focus since 2003."

The dedication included a hats-off to Rivers, the member who championed the care of children through the church's day care, starting in 1961.

"She was a bona-fide sincere, committed member who knew the future of South Memphis and this community was the quality of its day care," Robinson said.

"Lots of people, including elected officials, will tell you they grew up in this center."

One of the believers is rising sixth-grader Jerry Butler, who told the crowd he got his start at the child care.

"I have recently graduated from Circles of Success in the president's honor roll, which made me and my family proud."

-- Jane Roberts: (901) 529-2512



© 2012 Scripps Newspaper Group — Online