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The Connection breaks ground to expand in Summit

By Liz Keill

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SUMMIT — The long-anticipated expansion of The Connection for Women and Families will break ground at 4 p.m. on Friday, May 14. Completion is anticipated in the fall of 2011.

The Connection, located at the corner of Prospect Street and Morris Avenue, will remain open during the 18-month construction project.

"We're still on schedule," Executive Director Peggy Hagen said. "Some time ago, we considered a second story above the addition, but decided to keep that portion to one story. The idea is to make The Connection more comfortable for our current members. The fitness room will be less cramped and the locker rooms for the pool will be improved." Hagen said that the original building is 60 years old, with an addition completed 40 years ago. The expanded lobby and entrance are designed to encourage socializing at the facility, which serves a broad range of ages, from 6 months to 99 years. "We've always offered complimentary coffee and tea," Hagen said, to promote a sense of family.

The project will add 5,000 square feet of new space. Temporarily, the exit and entry to the parking lot will be reversed.

The Biber Partnership architectural firm has designed:

- New and expanded locker rooms, fitness center and classroom space.
- Renovated multi-purpose space.
- New entrance and lobby.
- Interior elevator.
- Automatic entry doors.
- New HVAC and lighting throughout.
- Re-designed parking lot.
- Safer, convenient drop-off area.

With the theme, Building for Our Future, The Connection has developed plans for a brick-by-brick walkway. An engraved brick can be purchased for \$250 and dedicated to a friend, family member or instructor.

The expansion will provide better program spaces, secure child care areas, improved on-site circulation and drop-off, accessible entry for special needs members and a more welcoming entrance and lobby.

Before becoming The Connection, the nonprofit was a YWCA, established in 1913. Today, the facility serves 7,000 members; 3,000 of them from Summit. It offers a host of programs, from swim classes to dance workshops, fencing and karate, yoga, Pilates, English as a Second Language, Pathways, after school programs for pre-schoolers and more. Special needs programs include a Teen Club Friday Night and a monthly dance for adults, co-sponsored by Our House.

"We keep up with trends and listen to suggestions from our members," Hagen said. Recent program additions have included lyrical jazz, hip hop and Latin rhythms. Coming in September will be a partnership program with Overlook Hospital that will focus on group exercises for those with Parkinson's disease, Hagen said.

The Connection has 17 full-time employees and about 130 part-time employees. In addition, volunteers teach ESL and Red Cross volunteers assist with swimming instruction.

When the building expands, the facility will lose 19 parking spaces. Through a city waiver, staff members have been allowed to use off-site long-term employee parking at the Sampson, Railroad Avenue and Chestnut parking lots and at the city's tier parking garage.

Visit TheConnectionOnline.org or call 908-273-4242 for information on fees, programs and events.



INVITING APPROACH — The spacious new lobby and entrance to The Connection for Women and Families will offer a more accessible layout with landscaping, a patio and a welcoming aura on Prospect Street. (Rendering by The Biber Partnership)