

Foster family homes planned for Manatee

By SARA KENNEDY - skennedy@bradenton.com

MANATEE -- Guardian Angels of Southwest Florida has announced plans to build foster family homes on a campus of more than 7 acres near Ellenton.

The Guardian Angels, affiliated with the Florida Baptist Children's Homes, hopes to build up to nine houses on property it purchased along Ellenton-Gillette Road, according to board member Ed Dick.

"We're trying to make forever homes for children," he said.

The campus could eventually house as many as 72 youngsters and foster parents in the new homes, each of which could cost roughly about \$250,000-300,000 to construct, said Bobbie Price, president of Bradenton-based Guardian Angels.

The capital campaign goal will be about \$1.1 million, planned for a summer launch, said Price, who hoped construction could start at least on the first two homes within the year.

"Instead of a large foster home, we are going to have individual homes," explained Dick. "We will hopefully find the right foster parents, give them the home rent-free, with one parent having to stay home, and the other one working."

"All the money given us will flow right through us to be given to the parents for foster care," he added.

The facility would be the eighth residential campus across the state owned and operated by Florida Baptist Children's Homes, said Julie Boyd, the organization's vice president for development and communications.

Others are at Fort Myers, Jacksonville, Lakeland, Miami, Pensacola, Tallahassee and Marianna, she said.

Guardian Angels won site plan approval for a smaller project several years ago, and are modifying the scope of the project and seeking new approval, Dick said.

"We'll own and operate it, and Guardian Angels will do the fundraising," Boyd said of the Manatee facility, which would receive children as young as infants and as old as 17 years.

"I can't say enough about those folks; their leadership and their passion are just phenomenal," Boyd said of the aptly named Guardian Angels. "If we had people like them all over the state, all the childrens' needs would be met."

Boyd's Lakeland-based organization also operates social work offices in various parts of the state, including one in Bradenton, according to its website, www.fbchomes.org.

The Guardian Angels is a Christian, faith-based organization, but its board represents a number of different churches and is nondenominational, Price explained.

"We partnered with Florida Baptist Children's Homes specifically because they've been in the business of providing for the needs of children for 106 years," Price said. "And they know how to take care of children. They've done it so long and so well."

Boyd is planning to meet tonight in Bradenton with the Guardian Angels board to review architects' site plans for the project, she added.

Those needing foster care have been removed from their homes due to abuse, neglect or abandonment, said Sheri Battles, family support worker for Florida Baptist Children's Homes, who works in Manatee County.

In addition to those already living in foster homes, every month there are 20-30 new children needing placement, she said. "That's a lot of kids," she said.

The new facility would provide more space and a way to better handle large sibling groups, Battles said.

"Often, we can get a call for a sibling group of four or five children that need a foster family and nobody can do that," said Battles. "Their houses aren't big enough, cars aren't big enough."

"It means those children who are removed from their parents are also split from their siblings," she said.

"If we had these homes, we could put all five in one home, and they would have the support of each other."

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Read more: <http://www.bradenton.com/2011/05/05/3169282/foster-family-homes-planned-for.html#ixzz1Ockwqvmy>