

C O M M U N I T Y N E W S**Child Care Center expansion begins**

The new year brings good news for many JSC employees. An early December announcement of expansion plans for the JSC Child Care Center made official intentions to build a new facility which will open in August 2000.

"This facility will be a lasting one for the center," said Center Director George Abbey. "We're looking forward to the new child care center to serve our community as well as our employees."

The new center is welcome news, as the popularity of the existing on-site care center has resulted in a growing waiting list. The current facility was opened in 1990, but within three years, organizers had already forecasted the need for more space and begun initiatives for expansion.

"We currently have around 100 children on the waiting list," said Kristy Hirning, Child Care Center executive director. "We have parents who call to be placed on the list as soon as they know they are expecting a child."

The existing child care center accommodates 78 children. The building, located at the back of the JSC campus near the Gilruth Center, is electrically heated and its wooden floor is beginning to weaken from the high humidity climate.

In contrast, the new site will be a near 12,000-square-foot facility that will serve up to 128 children from infancy to kindergarten and an adult staff of 28. There will be a lot more play space for each child as well, up to 50 feet per child as compared to 35 in the existing center.

It's being designed so it can be expanded easily, increasing the capacity



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GROUNDBREAKING — Brandon Patterson (at left) digs in at new site. Above (left to right) Rod Etchberger, JSC contracting officer, Henry Wyndon, JSC project manager, Zaky S. Zaky, president of G&Z Contracting, Kristy Hirning, JSC Child Care Center director, Tim Boyes, president of JSC Child Care Center, and Center Director George Abbey break ground for the new child care facility.

to 224 children and 44 adults. The new building will have a full-service kitchen, whereas currently, parents have to send their children

with prepared lunches. To reduce energy costs the new facility will be heated with natural gas instead of electricity.

"We'll be installing a gas line from Avenue B to the new facility," said Henry

Wyndon, JSC's project manager.

"Essentially, the line shall be large enough that it could also serve the Gilruth facility in the future. In the meantime, the new system will save enough money to pay for itself within the first six years."

G&Z Contracting, which also is working on several other JSC projects such as parking lot renovations, streetlight grounding and the batting cages at Gilruth, was selected as the small business contractor for the project. The firm has committed to a fast-paced construction schedule and plans

to have the building completed in July 2000. The groundbreaking ceremony December 3 culminated what many volunteers have worked toward for years.

"We've been working on this for the past six years," said Bobbie Swan, an outgoing Space Family Education Board member. The Space Family Education Board is the non-profit organization that was developed to create and oversee the Child Care Center. "So you can see why tears come to our eyes when we see this center finally becoming a reality." ■

Organizers near final phase of Longhorn Project

How does an Aggie become the leader of the Longhorn Project? That's a question Don Holick frequently asks himself, but as NASA's facility architect and planner he has found himself doing exactly that.

A few years ago, Center Director George Abbey and Clear Creek Independent School District Superintendent Dr. John Wilson began discussing possibilities for an educational interface between Bay Area high schools and NASA. The outcome of those discussions is a first of its kind agricultural science learning laboratory program that will foster student education in animal care and breeding, fruit and vegetable cultivation, recycling, and soil research.

"Here at JSC, we all work to conquer challenges that will provide us with a better future," said Holick. "Likewise, this program provides a forum for students to learn about closed-loop recycling and research into synthetic and future soils, that will contribute to our sources of food in the future."

As part of the program, JSC provides the land — 60 acres adjacent to Rocket Park — and spearheads development of the facilities needed to support the project. Holick and Melody Nation, JSC's real property officer, partnered with the school district representatives to put the package together.

Now when you look out toward Saturn Lane, you'll find Longhorn cattle grazing in the field. Six bovines to be exact, including an 1,800 lb. former World Champion steer with an 83-inch horn spread and a second place International Champion who features a unique "triple twist" horn. Ranchers also loan four heifers each year for the students to groom for the upcoming Livestock Show.

All of this has been supplied without using taxpayer dollars, much of it donated from local companies, caring individuals, or funded by corporate sponsors such as Dow Chemical Company, Brown & Root Government Services, or Shell Chemicals International. Volunteers from the Houston Livestock Show & Rodeo spearheaded the fund-raising efforts.

Technical consulting for the agriculture and aquaculture projects comes from Texas

A&M University and its Agricultural Extension Service. EARTH College of Costa Rica provides technical expertise for the recycling and soil conservation initiatives.

The finishing touches are being made this month to the Western Heritage Pavilion donated in part by the Houston Livestock Show & Rodeo. Visible from Saturn Road, the stone and rough timber pavilion is a 26- by 50-foot open-air verandah that provides viewing of the longhorn pasture

to JSC and Space Center Houston visitors.

However, the program extends beyond the longhorns. There are eight gardening beds where students can grow vegetables and areas set aside for an orchard, a greenhouse, and two aquaculture ponds to raise bass and other freshwater species.

"Our goal is to have an entirely self-sustaining farm," said Holick, a 1965 architecture graduate of Texas A&M University who has been at JSC since 1989 and claims he knew very little about farming before this project. "We'll use fertilizers that are generated from the farming process, including clippings, mulch, and other recycled materials from the garden."

Although it will be several months before everything is fully functional, students from CCISD already come to the site on a daily basis to care for the cattle. Other facilities include a barn, storage building, windmill, and water storage tank. Long-term plans call for closed-circuit video capability that will bring the experiments performed at the project to classrooms worldwide.

"All we have left to complete the project is to construct the plaza at the Western Heritage Pavilion and installation of water piping to the gardens, orchards, and aquaculture ponds," said Holick.

To help reach these final goals, the organizers are selling commemorative bricks for the pavilion through March 2000. For \$25, donors can have their name or the name of a friend or loved one engraved on a brick paver which will be permanently displayed as part of the pavilion flooring. Interested parties should e-mail or call Holick at x38039. ■



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Aggie Don Holick and his longhorned friend bond at the new Longhorn Project Pavilion.