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Ex-county official to direct Kroc plan

The Salvation Army hires Randy Curtis to organize Salem's plans for center

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The Salvation Army has hired former Marion County official Randy Curtis to act as the project director for development of its proposed multimillion dollar Kroc Community Center in Salem.

Curtis will oversee the development phase of the center, a process in which the local post will prove this area could provide long-term financial and program support for a new community center.

His initial duties will involve hiring an architectural firm and confirming the programs to be offered at the center, he said.

"We are very excited to have Randy on board," said Capt. Brian Saunders, the coordinator of the Marion/Polk County Salvation Army. "He's a consummate professional and knows project management very well."

The local post also hired its social-service director, Patricia Cuff-Smith, to act as the director of development for the community center, Saunders said.

Salem has been tapped to receive \$29 million to build the center and \$29 million for an endowment fund that would help pay operating costs. It would be called the Salvation Army Mid-Willamette Valley Ray & Joan Kroc Corps Community Center.

The Marion/Polk County Salvation Army must file its proposed programs list to the Salvation Army's Western Territorial headquarters in California by Jan. 17, Curtis said. The final development proposal is due by April 3.

The development phase, and Curtis' salary, is being paid from the \$29 million construction grant.

The money is part of a \$1.5 billion gift to the Salvation Army from the estate of McDonald's heiress Joan Kroc. The bequest is specifically directed to the creation of community centers across America.

As general services manager for Marion County, Curtis served as co-project director for Courthouse Square but left the project in December 1997 following public criticism of its management and financing.

Curtis currently serves as the president of the Salem Family YMCA, which has placed its own plans to build an aquatics center on hold while the Salvation Army pursues its community center. He will continue to hold that position.

YMCA Executive Director Dan Crocker said his board is not concerned about potential conflicts of interest.

"Randy has been very adept at knowing what is appropriate for his involvement," Crocker said. "His integrity has been something that has never been questioned."

For example, Curtis has asked someone else to step in and handle the process that will arrange any partnerships between the YMCA and the Salvation Army regarding the operation of different programs at the proposed center, Crocker said.

Saunders backed up that observation.

"Randy is not acting in his role as the president of the Y in this case. He has been hired because of his expertise," Saunders said. "The Y will be invited along with literally dozens of other agencies to participate in the programming at the community center."

Salem is one of eight projects in the Salvation Army's Western Territory now in the development phase. The territory includes the 13 Westernmost states.

"It's not competitive, but it's not a sure thing," Curtis said. "There's enough money to fund six of the eight applications, maybe seven of the eight."

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Potential sites

The seven other locations selected as potential Kroc community center sites in the West are:

Concord, Calif.

San Francisco

Kapolei, Hawaii

Aurora, Colo.

Coeur d'Alene, Idaho

Long Beach, Calif.

Phoenix, Ariz.