

Plainfield charter school, YWCA to share building

PLAINFIELD — The newly founded Ellen G. Pressman Charter School will share the building occupied by the YWCA of Central New Jersey, officials with both announced Friday.

The YWCA is at 232 E. Front St. in a building constructed in 1925 to house the 102-year-old local chapter of the national women's organization. The organization serves a six-county area including Union, Somerset, Middlesex, Morris and parts of Essex and Hunterdon counties. The Tudor Revival structure appears on the state and national Registers of Historic Places.

Pressman Charter School was established last October when it became one of six new New Jersey charter schools to have applications approved by the state. The facility, named for founder Norman Pressman's late sister who was a well-known figure in state education, will offer a "music-centric" curriculum that incorporates musical study with academics.

The school will be housed in a newly renovated space in the YWCA's new wing, with a separate entrance for students and faculty, according to Pressman, who said he believes the agreement between the two organizations will be mutually beneficial.

"The executive management and board of the YWCA of Central Jersey have been exceptionally professional, enthusiastic and committed (to the agreement)," Pressman said. "It's a wonderful facility, and they have programs here that are very focused on character, as ours are. This is going to be a great marriage."

LOCATION AND COST:

Pressman cited the facility's prime location in the heart of the city's downtown and what he characterized as low costs as reasons for the decision, saying the school also will benefit from an agreement to share YWCA amenities including its gymnasium, theater and swimming pool.

"This offers us many facilities that otherwise maybe we couldn't afford," he said.

The school, scheduled to open in September, is expected to begin its first year with 160 students in grades 6 and 7 before expanding to 240 students in grades 6-8 by 2010-2011. The school's portion of the YWCA building will include classrooms, science and music labs, a multi-purpose room, cafeteria, restrooms, administrative and nurse offices, and conference rooms.

The building's new wing was completed about two years ago and originally housed an early childhood learning center, according to YWCA Executive Director Cathleen Ludlow. The center closed late last year due to lack of interest after becoming "too much of a financial drain," she said, adding that YWCA officials have been seeking an alternative use for it ever since.

"We've been looking for the right group to come in and rent it, and when (Pressman officials) came to me and told me about their mission and what they were trying to do, I thought it was a good opportunity," Ludlow said.

Ludlow said her organization welcomes the agreement with the school, as students interested in joining after-school programs won't have to leave the building to participate.

"There is a definite synergy between the school and the YWCA," Ludlow said. "We are about empowering women, and the school is about empowering the children through academic excellence."

Mark Spivey: 908-243-6607; mspivey@MyCentralJersey.com