

Center's opening ceremony nears

\$5 million youth, office facility to begin tours, service

FOR THE MADERA TRIBUNE

The grand opening and ribbon cutting ceremonies for the John W. Wells Youth Center will begin at 4 p.m. Thursday, culminating a lasting dream.

Construction, at the corner of Fifth and Flume streets, began in 2008, but efforts to bring the center about — including those by its namesake — went on for years before that.

Among the guest speakers at the ribbon-cutting will be John W. Wells, who was Madera's mayor in 1968-71 and 1992-93. The longtime council member and four-term mayor was an advocate for the youth of Madera for decades.

According to the city's administrative services director, Michael McHatten, what was once just a dream of Wells and later an official community aspiration, part of the city's Vision statement, is now an up-to-date youth facility.

"This truly is an exciting time for Madera," said McHatten. "The Youth Center, the people associated with it as well as the programs involved, will provide Madera's youth an opportunity to dream and vision their future."

The 24,000-square-foot, two-story structure, which

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WENDY ALEXANDER/
THE MADERA TRIBUNE
ABOVE — Liz Magallanes, program leader, practices dancing in the dance studio at the facility.

RIGHT — Mary Anne Seay, director of Parks and Community Services, walks across the lobby of the John W. Wells Youth Center on Tuesday.



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**John
Scarborough
walks through
the recreation
room.**



WENDY ALEXANDER/THE MADERA TRIBUNE

Ren Hallett, from the Big Brothers Big Sisters program, tries out the Ping-Pong table at the youth center.

Center

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was budgeted to cost some \$5 million, will also house the offices of the Madera Parks and Community Services Department. Director Mary Anne Seay said she was excited about the future of the center.

“The community has a clear and unwavering dedication to the development of its youth as evidenced by the construction of the center and the many partnerships and programs that will take place for many years to come,” said Seay.

The police department, Madera Housing Authority, and Kings View Mental Health will also have offices in the new building.

Youth will have access to a game room with pool, Ping-Pong, Foosball, and air hockey. Adjacent is the Teen



WENDY
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**Freddy
Arias, recreation and
community
programs
supervisor,
shoots a few
baskets in
the gym.**

Lounge, where they can relax, socialize or play Wii video games. Other amenities include a dance studio, arts and crafts room complete with a kiln, and a digital recording studio where teens may record their own songs

and music and burn them to a CD.

A full-size gymnasium is equipped with electronic, remote control scoreboards, a sound system, and a large drop-down screen for presentations.

The gym features regulation basketball and volleyball courts and smaller courts for younger children. The gym will be used for recreation, such as by the Adult and Youth Basketball leagues in the fall, and also be available for large gatherings. Other programs are planned.

Adjoining the gym is a kitchen/concession area with refrigerator, dishwasher and microwave for serving visitors and spectators attending games.

Public tours of the center will be offered following the opening and ribbon-cutting ceremonies. Activities will be happening and refreshments will be served. Staff will be available in each room to answer questions about the new center and future programming.

Additional free parking for the event will be available at Smith Manor Grace Chapel at 801 E. Yosemite Ave.