

JUN 24 1999

168

Welcome

Salvation Army makes a home downtown

When tragedy singles out south-central Kansas, citizens know that the Salvation Army stands ready to channel money, volunteers and goods to those who need them unexpectedly and urgently. Whether a tornado, flood or unnatural disaster is to blame, the Salvation Army can count on the community outpouring to be swift and generous.

Emergency relief is only the most visible and exciting part of the Salvation Army's vast mission, though. The 116-year-old local agency also takes daily responsibility for some of the most vulnerable children and adults in our midst. And thank goodness it does.

It's that less glamorous, lower profile role of reliable safety net for children and families that gets easier and more comfortable for the Salvation Army to play starting today. The Salvation Army Koch Center, incorporating the former site of the YWCA headquarters at 350 N. Market, becomes a newly bright, positive presence in downtown Wichita, as it opens its doors with a dedication ceremony at 8 a.m. and public tours from 10:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. today.

The new center was seeded by a \$1 million gift from Charles and Elizabeth Koch and a \$1 million gift from Koch Industries. Anything but institutionalized in its atmosphere, the Koch Center isn't so much bigger than the 75-year-old Booth Home and Hospital on West 11th Street as it is much, much better. Thirty girls and boys, most of them part of the juvenile-justice system, will live and get intensive counseling on the upper of two floors. The adaptable lower floor can accommodate 40 beds for families in need of

transitional housing, 16 of which will be considered emergency shelter. A courtyard will become a playground.

For the families who will spend up to two years living at the Koch Center and learning how to reclaim their own independence, the nice new digs promise to serve their spirit as well as their immediate needs. "It tells them, 'You're not a second-rate citizen. The people in this town care about you,'" says Major Dallas Raby, city commander of the Salvation Army.

For Ms. Koch, who chaired the \$12.5 million capital campaign and also serves on the national and local boards of the Salvation Army, the Kochs' involvement in the project was a natural, given that the Army's community role, she says, is about "people sparking the enthusiasm, the will, to do well."

The Eagle editorial board's gratitude goes to all those donors and volunteers who made the positive move possible.

— For the board, Rhonda Holman

HOW TO HELP

The Salvation Army Koch Center still needs donations of furniture and other items, as well as volunteers willing to mentor children and work closely with families. "We really want the community to buy into this new building," says Staci Warner, director of development. To offer help or ideas, call her at 263-2769.