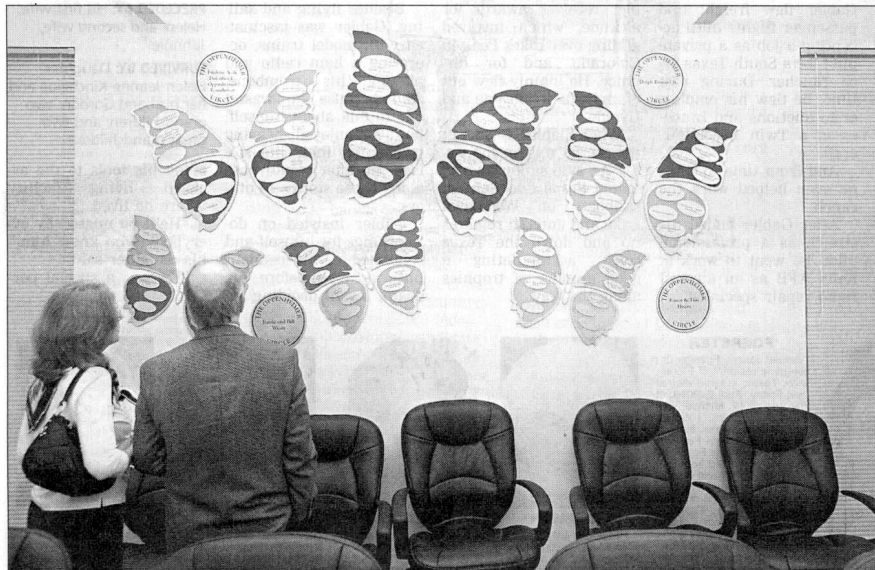


# METRO AND STATE NEWS

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PHOTOS BY J. MICHAEL SHORT/SPECIAL TO THE EXPRESS-NEWS

Harriet and David Oppenheimer look over the butterfly wall art acknowledging major donors to the Oppenheimer Center.

## South Side center dedicated

Mission Road facility's expansion gives developmentally disabled room to grow.

BY JENNIFER R. LLOYD  
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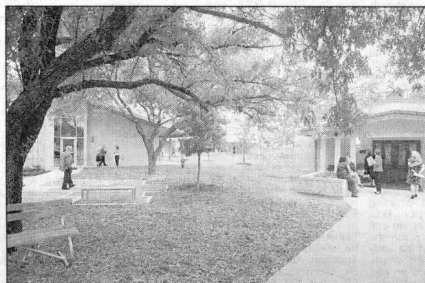
Ranking among the newest developments on San Antonio's South Side is a recently completed expansion at the Mission Road Development Center for children and adults with special needs.

On Sunday, community leaders and residents of the campus dedicated the new Jesse H. and Susan R. Oppenheimer Center for Programming and Recreation that will be a daily haven for nearly 150 children and adults with developmental disabilities.

"There are a lot of

great things happening on the South Side these days, a lot of new development — the new campus going up for Texas A&M San Antonio... we have a beautiful Toyota plant and, of course, this facility," said state Sen. Carlos Uresti, who lives within three miles of the campus. "It's a new day for this part of the city in so many ways."

Susan Oppenheimer said she and her husband Jesse, who died last fall, provided the money to kick-start the fundraising campaign with a \$1 million challenge grant. Nearly 100 others donated



Visitors tour the grounds during the grand opening of Mission Road Development's Oppenheimer Center.

more than \$3 million to build the 12,200-square-foot center, officials said. The center falls under the umbrella of the Mission Road Ministries.

San Antonio-based Mar-

mon Mok Architecture designed the building to maximize natural light and take advantage of sustainable features such as a

See CENTER/15A

## S.E. SIDE DISPUTE

# Work stops on baseball complex

Manager's order angers officials

BY GUILLERMO X. GARCIA  
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A \$70,000 bill for a self-directed pay raise has shut down construction at the SE Skyline Pony baseball complex, forcing a postponement to the planned start of the season this week at the controversy-dogged facility.

The disagreement over the unpaid, questionable bill is the latest unwanted publicity surrounding the Southeast Side project, the subject of charges that Bexar County commissioners played favorites with the project's developer.

The dispute, which may end up in court, once again has thrust the commissioners into a politically charged quarrel among longtime friends who have contributed to — or been paid consultants on — commissioners' campaigns.

Project manager Gabriel Perez informed commissioners in a March 28 letter that he was "stopping performance" at the \$3.3 million project on April 2 — essentially halting work at the site — a week before the start of the season.

He said he has not been paid for work done at the seven-field complex, one of 13 sports venues approved in a 2008 bond election to be financed by



Perez

See BASEBALL/15A

# SAISD to offer a career path in public safety

Program starting next fall will train future officers, firefighters.

BY EVA RUTH MORAVEC  
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Ask children what they want to be when they grow up and they'll often share visions of donning the duds of a firefighter or a police officer. But years later, those goals may change, and the possibility of serving the community fades away.

Mayor Julian Castro hopes a public safety career path for high school students will keep those dreams intact. The new program will accept 30 San Antonio Independent School District juniors and seniors when it opens next fall at Edison High School.

"This will be an outlet for children to tackle their dreams," Castro told the City Council last week. "We strive for the highest quality of police officers and firefighters, and it's even better when those officers and firefighters are home-grown."

The brainchild of SAISD, San Antonio College, City Council members, Fire Chief Charles Hood and Police Chief William McManus, the career track program is similar to existing ones in Austin, Odessa and Phoenix.

Most of the program's \$120,000 in startup costs and \$50,000 in annual expenses will be covered by grants, officials said.

Upon graduation, students will have more than 25 SAC semester hours and a strong



Fire Chief Charles Hood: Says program will attract inner-city kids to public service.

background in public safety.

"This expansive outreach will enable us to both inspire and educate possible fire and police candidates, ensuring they reach their full potential," McManus said.

But before students step into a police or firefighting job, they face a strict entry process. Candidates must pass a physical fitness exam and drug test; score well on the college readiness ACCUPLACER test; have good attendance, grades and behavior; and have a clear criminal record. They also must participate — with their parents — in a staff interview.

Gary Fox, who coordinates

SAC's fire science program, said the tough process ensures the right students will enlist.

"None of them are going to be force-fed," he said. "It will be for students that are very interested. Our program is very busy now, and we think this is going to be really successful."

Although the program focuses on careers in the fire or police fields, officials realize not every graduate will become a public safety professional, largely because of a gap between when students graduate and when they can enroll in the fire or police academy — at age 19 and 20.5, respectively. Assistant City Attorney Erik Walsh said the agencies are considering offering jobs to keep graduates interested.

Christine Ybarra, principal

of Phoenix's 400-student Franklin High School, said a wider variety of public safety agencies step in to help students bypass the issue of the gap year.

"Lots of city jobs are frozen in these economic times, but at age 18, they can start cadet training, security jobs and other work," Ybarra said.

"Our students come already trained, and they're very disciplined."

Ybarra's 3-year-old school has evolved from a program similar to Edison's to the stand-alone public safety campus of Phoenix Mayor Phil Gordon's dreams. Inspired by an at-risk son, Gordon worked to start the program while now-San Antonio City Manager

See EDISON/16A