

North Richmond young adult center opens

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A new center in North Richmond will offer free access to educational resources, employment guidance, mentoring, recreation and social activities to young adults ages 16 to 25.

The North Richmond Young Adult Empowerment Center is the product of input from young people in the low-income neighborhood, an unincorporated area just outside Richmond city limits.

A grand opening celebration Saturday will include a tour of the facility at 50 Silver Ave., lunch and a chance to learn about the participating groups and service providers.

"We're really excited that it's going to open in time for summer, when young people have a lot of time on their hands," said Contra Costa Supervisor John Gioia, whose district includes North Richmond.

The idea for the center germinated in 2006, after Gioia heard from young adults in the area about the need for resources to better their circumstances and a safe place to spend idle time. North Richmond has few basic services and one of the highest unemployment rates in the county.

"We all know there needs to be more opportunities for youths to get connected to good activities," Gioia said. "We thought it was important to have a place that was convenient for young adults to get connected to life skills and job training."

While past efforts to create a center never came to fruition, a collaboration of agencies and groups has worked to make the Empowerment Center a reality at a vacant, 2,200-square-foot office space owned by the Contra Costa Housing Authority.

Offerings will be phased in and ultimately include employment and career services, access to training and educational opportunities, health education, a computer center and recreational activities. A career counselor will be on site.

"The greatest need is not a job itself, but providing the life skills and job training to put people in the best position to earn a career," Gioia said.

Participating groups include Gioia's office, the Contra Costa Housing Authority, Employment and Human Services Department, Redevelopment Agency, Workforce Development Board and Health Services Department; the county library; the North Richmond Service Integration Team; Contra Costa College; North Richmond YouthBuild; Bay Area PeaceKeepers; and Street Tech.

"It's a great partnership between county departments and community-based agencies," Gioia said. "We want to strengthen those links and have people feel comfortable with the center."

An advisory panel of young people from the neighborhood will help decide what the center offers, and the facility will be made available for nonprofit groups to present their programs, Gioia said.