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Kansas City
Area Transportation
Authority

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Fourth Quarter 2002
Vol. 4 Issue 1



Innovative MetroCenter Opens For Business

Dwayne Crompton, executive director of the KCMC Child Development Corporation, likes to tell other child care professionals from other cities all about the brand new 39th and Troost MetroCenter.

“They look at me stunned and ask, ‘The public transit agency is taking a lead role in providing child care?’” said Crompton, during the MetroCenter’s Nov. 14 dedication ceremony.

He paused, then added, “The transit authority where I come from is.”

The ATA opened the unique two-in-one MetroCenter in mid-November. It houses both a comfortable transit waiting room and the 15,000-square foot Metro Early Learning Center. KCMC, Greater Kansas City’s largest non-profit child care provider, operates the learning center, which accommodates more than 100 children, ranging from six weeks to five years old.

“The Metro Early Learning Center is a place where KCMC is helping some of The Metro’s youngest customers literally get a ‘Head Start,’” said ATA General Manager Mark Huffer.

He called the journey from the project’s concep-



The new MetroCenter is located where two of the busiest Metro routes, the #25–Troost and #39–39th Street, meet. Combined, more than 11,000 trips are made on the two routes each week-day. (Above) Honored guests during the center’s official dedication connect two banners symbolizing the partnership between the ATA and KCMC Child Development Corporation.

tion to its dedication a “long one made smooth through exceptional cooperation,” between federal and Kansas City, Mo., officials, as well as various neighborhood associations and private foundations.

United States Sen. Christopher “Kit” Bond and Rep. Karen McCarthy secured federal grants for construction. The Hall Family and George K. Baum Family foundations made the donations nec-

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INSIDE: More funding needed to avert severe service cuts

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essary to complete the learning center's interior.

The Federal Transit Administration (FTA) played a critical role throughout the entire process, according to ATA Project Management Director Jim Pritchett. Personnel from the local FTA office reviewed the initial "basic plan," he said, and assisted the Authority in developing the dual project in compliance with federal guidelines.

"The FTA staff was proactive, helping us every step of the way," Pritchett said.

He explained the project had an obvious revitalization impact on a "blighted area." Linking child care and transit service significantly influenced FTA's approval of the plan "to improve safety and convenience for transit customers." How quickly the various neighborhood associations embraced the concept also greatly impressed FTA officials.

"Transit and child care are a perfect fit," said Troost Corridor Community Association Executive Director Charles Monroe. "There is a lot of bus traffic in that area, and there is a need for more child care. This facility doesn't just change the problem; it creates solutions."

Crompton praised the ATA for taking a lead role in addressing what he called "the child care problem."

"For many years, child care professionals, community, social and political activists, have struggled with a hard problem," he said. "How do we give access to quality child care to parents who use mass transportation to travel to and from work?"

"This project addresses that problem in an innovative and surprising way."

Kansas City, Mo., Director of City Planning and Development Vicki Noteis observed that the center represented the FOCUS KC plan being put in action. She cited a passage from the plan that described a person riding a bus and making one stop for child care and to run errands, such as stopping at the dry cleaners.

The MetroCenter is directly across the street from a dry cleaner.

There is a "natural link" between transit and child care, Pritchett said, adding, "I know this facility is going to make life easier for Metro customers. They can get inside while waiting for their buses and make one less stop to get their child excellent developmental care."

Ila Eaves is among the first Metro customers to use the Early Learning Center. She rides the #25-Troost to work and now leaves her 2-year-old daughter at the center.

'Signs Of Change' Take Center Stage

In 1972, ATA bus service underwent a multi-year transformation, starting with a new name – The Metro – and a new bus paint scheme, a single blue stripe on a white bus.

Now, exactly 30 years later, another Metro renewal process, Operation: Welcome Aboard, is in full swing.

Thirty-four new buses have rolled out, sporting the new blue, teal and silver lines, with the rest of the fleet to follow.

The most visible changes will be new signage and refurbished shelters. New Metro bus stop signs are being installed that provide more detailed route information.

The first of the new Metro Stop signs to be installed was unveiled at 63rd and Troost in October.

"It is literally

a sign of change," said Huffer.

Despite the ATA's budget concerns, replacing all 6,000 Metro Stop signs remains a priority for the agency.

"Our stops are where our customers start their trips on The Metro," ATA Marketing Director Cynthia Baker said.

"Making the stops more inviting plays a vital role in retaining current customers and attracting new ones." ■



ATA General Manager Mark Huffer joins long-time Metro customer Tracey Myers in unveiling the new Metro Stop sign at 63rd and Troost.

"It's very convenient," Eaves told *The Kansas City Star*. "And it's on one of the main bus routes."

The dedication was held one year and five days after the official groundbreaking marked the start of construction. A local architectural firm, Gould Evans Goodman Associates, designed the facility. KC Heritage Construction Company transformed the blueprint into reality.

The \$4 million MetroCenter was completed on budget and ahead of schedule. ■