



Southeast Louisiana Receives Christmas Gift from United Methodists

December 18, 2015, Louisiana – Mr. Robert Temple, Chair of the Board of Directors of Louisiana United Methodist Children and Family Services signed papers today to acquire 125 acres of land on Highway 445 north of Robert, LA. Temple stated, “I am excited! This land will be the permanent home of Methodist Children’s Home of Greater New Orleans which will fulfill the needs of children and families far into the future.”

Rick Wheat, President and CEO, said, “We can now take the best of all we’ve done elsewhere in Louisiana and put it on this new property in the Greater New Orleans region. We are excited to end our extensive search for property and I cannot imagine a more appropriate time of year than the Christmas season to do this. We are eager to begin developing the property and constructing facilities to serve the children, families and communities of southeast Louisiana for the next 100 years.”

Wheat stated, “I cannot express enough gratitude to the members of the Board of Directors of the Methodist Home for Children of New Orleans. After Katrina, they had the wisdom and foresight to ensure services for the children and families of southeast Louisiana continue far into the future. This property was purchased with a fund established by the former Board designated for this purpose. With roots planted in New Orleans in 1886, we are building services for the future.”

Luke Allen, Vice President of Operations said, “It’s a very fine property. It is high and dry with just a small wetland area on the north side. The land is centrally located in southeast Louisiana to meet the entire region’s treatment needs. Today, we concluded a search which began nearly four years ago. During that time, Mrs. Thea Gegenheimer, our agent, has shown us dozens of potential sites. We have been assisted by officials throughout the area who have gone out of their way to answer questions and provide guidance. Everywhere, people have been excited and encouraging.”

“We’ve had our own excitement, too!” Wheat said, “In our search for the ideal site, our staff members have fallen into creeks, attended community meetings, slipped in swamps, have ridden four wheelers, and have stuck SUVs in mud. We have taken photos of beautiful wild flowers and learned what “cloud of mosquitoes” really means. We have hiked for miles through tight thickets and have come across majestic old oaks. Southeast Louisiana is a lush, beautiful, lively part of God’s universe.”

Founded in 1902, Louisiana United Methodist Children and Family Services cares for children, families and communities throughout Louisiana. Today, the organization operates three United Methodist children’s homes located in Ruston, Sulphur and Mandeville which care for 128 children and adolescents. It provides community-based care in the Family Counseling Center and in 25 Family Plus counseling sites throughout Louisiana, maintains a transitional living program for foster children preparing for adulthood, has a 100-bed Therapeutic Foster Care program, and operates the Outdoor Wilderness Learning Center – an 800 acre, outdoor treatment center in north central Louisiana. The organization has the Allen Career Center, a vo-tech school

for children in foster care, and Howard School, which provides alternative education services on the grounds of Louisiana Methodist Children's Home.

Currently, Methodist Children's Home of Greater New Orleans operates in leased buildings on the grounds of Northlake Behavioral Health Systems in Mandeville where it provides intensive residential care for 20 young boys who cannot live with their families or in a less intensive setting like foster care.

Marlin Giacona, Director of the Mandeville center shared, "Since Katrina, three organizations have really sheltered our southeast Louisiana children's home. Immediately after Katrina, state Representative-elect Reid Falconer and state Senator Ben Nevers communicated our need for temporary space to Louisiana's Department of Health and Hospitals which allowed us to lease space on the grounds of Southeast Louisiana Hospital in Mandeville. After DHH closed the hospital, St. Tammany Parish took responsibility for managing the property and Pat Brister, St. Tammany Parish President, allowed us to continue operations without interruption. When Northlake Behavioral Health System began managing the property, Northlake CEO, Richard Kramer, graciously allowed us to continue in the leased buildings."

The next step is to clear and prepare the property for construction. Then, while the first residential care buildings are being constructed, a portion of the property will be prepared for outdoor activities and animal-assisted therapies, bringing the most effective and exciting programs of our Outdoor Wilderness Learning Center in Dubach, Louisiana, to our new home in the New Orleans region.

During the next century, this property will allow Methodist Children's Home of Greater New Orleans to provide an array of services such as structured residential care, equine-assisted psychotherapy, intensive alternative educational services, and it will serve as home for the expanding home and community services we will offer throughout the region.

Wheat concluded, "We are preparing now for our next 100 years of ministry to children and families in southeast Louisiana where 2.3 million people live. We are excited about the future and being able to fully pursue our mission in Louisiana's most densely populated region".

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