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Local News: Tuesday, November 12, 1991

ADVERTISING

Bringing Old, Young Together Helps Both -- Project Links Housing, Community Care

Barbara A. Serrano

Seventy-two-year-old Fortunada Baltazar, a recent Filipina immigrant, sought solace from children when she felt lonely and sad. And in youth, she has found a renewed zest for life.

As a part-time teacher's aide in the International District, she recites the ABCs and teaches her favorite Filipino songs to the 3- and 4-year-old children who know her as "Nadi."

"They give me happiness," Baltazar said of her young friends at the Denise Louie Early Childhood Education Center.

"I feel comfortable now."

Bringing young and old people together benefits both, social workers believe. And it is a concept they plan to spotlight as part of an innovative community-care and housing project in the International District.

If all goes as planned, the Asian-American elderly community will gain 60 new housing units and a central location for a variety of services - all specially designed to match their **cultural** values.

The Denise Louie center, which provides child-care and Headstart classes, and the International Health Clinic also plan to move to the new site at Eighth Avenue South and South Dearborn Street.

Both are looking forward to new and expanded space, but proponents say they also want to give **senior** citizens a chance to mingle with the new generation.

"Children by their very nature bring an enthusiasm and this wonderful sense of life to any environment," said Karen Ko, executive director of the center.

"It's nice for them to have some contact with older people. It's an important part of their learning about changes in life."

The Seattle-Chinatown International District Preservation and Development Authority and 10 nonprofit agencies are moving ahead with the proposed development this next year. The state and city of Seattle have earmarked \$175,000 for design and planning.

Unlike other housing and community programs for **senior** citizens, supporters say, this one will serve retired Asian-Americans who are too frail to live independently but too healthy to move into a nursing home.

The centerpiece involves 60 units of housing where low-income Asian-American residents will get day-to-day help from doctors, social workers and nutritionists who speak their native languages.

The center also will become a focal point for adult day-health care, respite care, case management services, health screening services and a program that provides home-delivered meals for the elderly.

The vision is one based largely on that of a nationally recognized program in San Francisco's Chinatown. Established in 1973, On Lok **Senior** Health Services now serves 325 people.

Given the preliminary results of a recent survey and the 1990 census, proponents have no doubt of the need here in Seattle.

Of the 8,472 Asian-Americans aged 65 and over and **living** in King County, many are first-generation and non-English-speaking immigrants who remain isolated from social services, said Irene Woo of the International District Housing Alliance.

"If you don't have a family and don't speak the language, it's really hard to venture out as other people would," Woo said.

Two nursing homes in Seattle cater separately to Chinese and Japanese clients, she said, but no nursing homes or other housing programs in King County are capable of serving all Asians.

Having a **senior** center that's truly "multicultural" doesn't mean just serving white rice and celebrating Chinese New Year's, Woo said. What elderly Asians often lack is an environment where they feel comfortable speaking their native languages, she said.

Woo and other social workers are particularly interested in assisting the dozens of elderly Chinese and Filipino men who continue to live in the International District's hotels.

Because of restrictive immigration laws that were not changed until 1964, Woo said, many Asian elderly men have no relatives here and have come to rely on their small social network in the International District.

"If you pull them away from that, it's a real social withdrawal for them," she said.

And with Asian immigration to the United States just as strong as it was in the early 1900s, she said, the demand for **senior** programs and **assisted** housing will remain constant.

The new project on Eighth Avenue is one envisioned for 20 years.

Thanks to the community's lobbying efforts and the political support of the Metro Council, the federal government and Seattle, the authority will gain 1.4 acres of Metro surplus property.

The site was appraised at \$2 million. But the city bought it for \$150,000 and will sell it to the International District PDA for the same price.

Bob Santos, the development authority's executive director, figures it's only a matter of time before the community

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Updated 9:30 AM

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center/housing project becomes reality.

"We'll have to raise \$10 million to build it," said Santos, a longtime community activist and lobbyist for the Asian-American community. "But, hey, it's no big deal. If you get to the right people at the right time, you have a good chance of getting the funds."

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