NEWS FROM Elizabethport Presbyterian Center, Inc.

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COMMUNITY RESIDENTS, DIGNITARIES JOIN TOGETHER FOR GROUND BREAKING OF NEW ELIZABETHPORT PRESBYTERIAN CENTER

ELIZABETH, NJ – Ground is being broken today at the corner of First Street and Magnolia Avenue for the new $4.1 million Elizabethport Presbyterian Center – a building five times larger than the facility which has served Elizabethport for the past 42 years. Turning shovels of earth will be City of Elizabeth Mayor Chris Bollwage, community leaders, city officials and area residents including children representing center programs.

The center, or "The Pres" as it has come to be called by more than two generations of Elizabeth residents, was founded by the Presbytery of Elizabeth in 1965, amidst a period of urban unrest throughout the country. Since then, the center has provided faith-based social services; family and individual counseling; enrichment, youth and education programming; job training and placement, among other vital human services, to an ever-increasing number of area residents.

"The Elizabethport Presbyterian Center," said Mayor J. Christian Bollwage, who is a keynote speaker at today's groundbreaking, "has dedicated its existence – with great success – to providing stability and opportunity to the oldest area of our City. The Center and the Presbytery can take great pride in the role each has played in Elizabethport's residential and commercial revitalization. They never lost faith in the residents of our city and today they are being rewarded for that faith."

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According to Roderick Spearman, the Center's Executive Director, the commercial and residential revitalization of Elizabethport has brought many new immigrants into the community. "With that growth," Spearman said, "the demand for our services has spiraled well beyond the physical space available in our original building."

To answer the need, the Center's volunteer board embarked on a capital fund raising campaign to design and construct a new community facility on the site of the original center. Board President, Rev. Russell C. Block of Berkeley Heights and Dr. William Reed of Summit assumed co-chairmanship of the campaign, no small task for a non-profit whose work was little known outside the City of Elizabeth and the 51 central New Jersey churches within the Presbytery of Elizabeth.

According to Block, the Center's continuing capital campaign has raised, to date, $925,000 toward its $1.5 million goal in private philanthropy and has received $600,000 in Neighborhood Revitalization Tax Credits and $462,000 in City of Elizabeth Community Development block grants. Upon completion of the Capital Campaign, the remaining building costs will be financed.

Elizabeth First Ward Councilman Manny Grova, Jr., a member of the center's Board and chairman of the fund raising campaign's Business and Commercial Division, said he was looking toward a renewed local effort now that ground following the groundbreaking for the new facility. "The Center has been providing vital services for over 40 years and the Elizabethport business community is demonstrating its gratitude for that," he said.

Rev. Robert Foltz-Morrison, Executive Presbyter of the Presbytery of Elizabeth, characterized the groundbreaking as "a proud day for the Presbytery's 51 churches. The human needs for faith-based services are as great in 2007 as they were when this country's cities were in turmoil in the mid-60's. The Presbytery answered the need then and continues to recognize that need today."

Leading an "honor roll" of community partners at the ceremony is Joseph Forline, PSE&G's vice president-customer relations. "As the utility that serves our state's largest cities, PSE&G is proud to have the opportunity to invest in the future of Elizabeth and its residents," Forline said. "We believe that there is no better investment than in our children. The $500,000 in funding we are providing to build this new center will pay dividends for years to come."

Others representing community partners at the ceremony include William Best, Senior Vice President & Manager Community Development Banking, PNC Bank; Lois Greco, Vice President/Evaluation Officer, Wachovia Regional Foundation;

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Janice Goldstein, Program Supervisor, NRTC, Department of Community Affairs; and Armando Rodrigues, Project Chair, EDC.

Also addressing the crowd is Lamar Grady, an analyst with the Elizabeth Department of Health and a business entrepreneur who grew up in Elizabethport and still lives in the community. Grady, a graduate of Stockton State, was a "regular" at the center during his formative years and credits the volunteers and staff for "keeping him off the street, focused and goal-oriented." "The Pres was an extension of my home," he said. "They gave me the chance to be a healthy kid."

The new Elizabethport Presbyterian Center will provide 27,375 square feet of space on two floors. Designed by Elizabeth architect James R. Guerra, the center will provide six classrooms, an indoor playgrounds, a computer education center, a game room, an adult education center, community rooms and administrative offices. VILU Construction, Inc., of Elizabeth is the general contractor.

Services and programs provided in the original building, 184 First Street, will be conducted at three separate locations during construction, Executive Director Spearman said. The Computer Training and Job Readiness Programs have already relocated to 134 First Street as have Community-Based Case Management Services. The Infant-Toddler Program will open there in January, 2008. Social Service programs, including the Food Pantry, have moved to 200 Second Street. Administrative functions and all youth programs are in the process of moving to the lower level of Mount Calvary Church, 223-225 First Street.

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