

St. Gerard looks ahead to first laboratory

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7 THE RECORD

Board members of the nonprofit St. Gerard Campus gathered last week to symbolically break ground for a new 480-square-foot science lab provided by a \$30,000 grant and donations.

St. Gerard's — a local institution for 30 years — is an accredited high school for mothers-to-be. When completed, the one-classroom school's lab may enable students to earn the lab credits they need to compete for scholarships and even begin a certified nursing assistant program. When completed, the structure will feature 24 lab stations. But the grant from the Meninak Club of Jacksonville is just for the structure but not to purchase equipment.

St. Augustine City Commissioner Don Crichlow donated a grant to design the lab.

"It's been needed for a long time," Crichlow said. "It raises the quality of the educational experience here at St. Gerard."

Director Caroline Wolff said part of the cost of the grant was paid by the Meniak Foundation. Donations also came from Mike Davis, Matt Baker and contractor Guy Guernon of Guy Guernon Contracting Inc.

Board members attending included Crichlow, Chairman Jude Nwoga, Pat Greenfield, Judy Klein, Father Liguori, Dr. Santiago Rosado, Tim Whelan, James Whitehouse and Richard Ziemann.

However, donations of equipment are needed.

St. Gerard's provides free pregnancy testing and sonograms for teenagers and women, and also contains an interfaith Christian high school with daycare.

Babies stay in the classroom with mothers for the first two months after birth.

In the early years of St. Gerard's, founder Wolff began by helping one pregnant girl thrown out by her family.

She later expanded her assistance into a mission that has helped thousands of cast-out girls and their babies, many who now live locally and still support the institution. A large percentage are nurses or in other medical-related fields.

Wolff said the new lab facility may better prepare her girls for those careers.

"We wanted to help them obtain that goal," Wolff said.

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