

Center to cut through racial barrier  
By John Yellig  
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*Harold Bare, president of the Hope Foundation, calls the fence a relic of Charlottesville's history of strained race relations. The Daily Progress/ Brady Wolfe*

Hope Foundation president Harold Bare stands in front of a fence adjacent to his foundation's property that closes off access to a city park in the 10th & Page neighborhood of Charlottesville on Friday, August 25 2006.

A fence that has long separated the 10th and Page neighborhood from the wealthy Venable neighborhood will be cut open today as part of the expansion of the Hope Community Center on 11th Street Northwest.

Local children will gain access to the playing field behind Venable Elementary School. Instead of walking several blocks out of the way or scaling the 6-foot-high barrier to get there, youngsters will have a straight shot.

The fact that the field's only entrance is on the Venable side, not the 10th and Page side, is a relic of Charlottesville's historically strained race relations, said Harold Bare, president of the Hope Foundation and pastor of Covenant Church on Rio Road.

Bare hopes the spirit of inclusiveness the opening will foster will improve the attitudes - and academic achievement - of Venable students from 10th and Page.

"If you've got a low-achieving student who's got to climb a fence or go around a block to get to school ... you're not going to have a good attitude when [he gets] there," he said.

A sidewalk paved with bricks engraved with the names of neighborhood children and donors to the center will connect the opening to 11th Street.

Charles Alexander, a local motivational speaker who goes by the name Alex-Zan, grew up on the corner of Page and 11th streets and remembers the fence from his childhood.

"We kind of went through a little side fence or sometimes we'd climb the fence," he recalled, adding that the opening is "good for the community."

The Hope Foundation is finishing work on a new community center across the lot from the existing one. There will be room for classes, banquets and other events there.

The foundation surveyed 250 local residents to determine what needs the community center could satisfy. Bare said the center would eventually offer a computer lab, drug and financial counseling, tutoring, teen parenting classes and other services.

Space has been dedicated for a police substation at the center.

Sgt. Mark Brake, supervisor of the Charlottesville Police Department's Neighborhood Services Bureau, said he didn't know if his department would open an official substation per se, but said police would definitely take advantage of it.

"Whether or not we're going to staff it through my office ... we haven't sat down and talked about it a great deal yet," Brake said. "I think it's definitely going to create a good avenue to meet more citizens in that particular area."

Once the new building is open, probably in about six weeks, the foundation will renovate the current community center, which opened in 1999, Bare said.

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