

State to fund \$1.5 million Senior center on site

By David Adlerstein
Times City Editor

The 80-year-old Holy Family Center in Apalachicola, long the focal point of Roman Catholic outreach to the African-American community, will be revived as a senior/community center beginning next year, thanks to a \$1.5 million state grant from the Florida Department of Elder Affairs.

Crist and Department of Elder Affairs Secretary E. Douglas Beach announced the grants Friday in Miami, when they were breaking ground for the Little Havana Activities and Nutrition Centers.

The Miami project will receive \$2 million to build its center, as will another in Alachua County, while the Apalachicola project will get \$1.5 million.

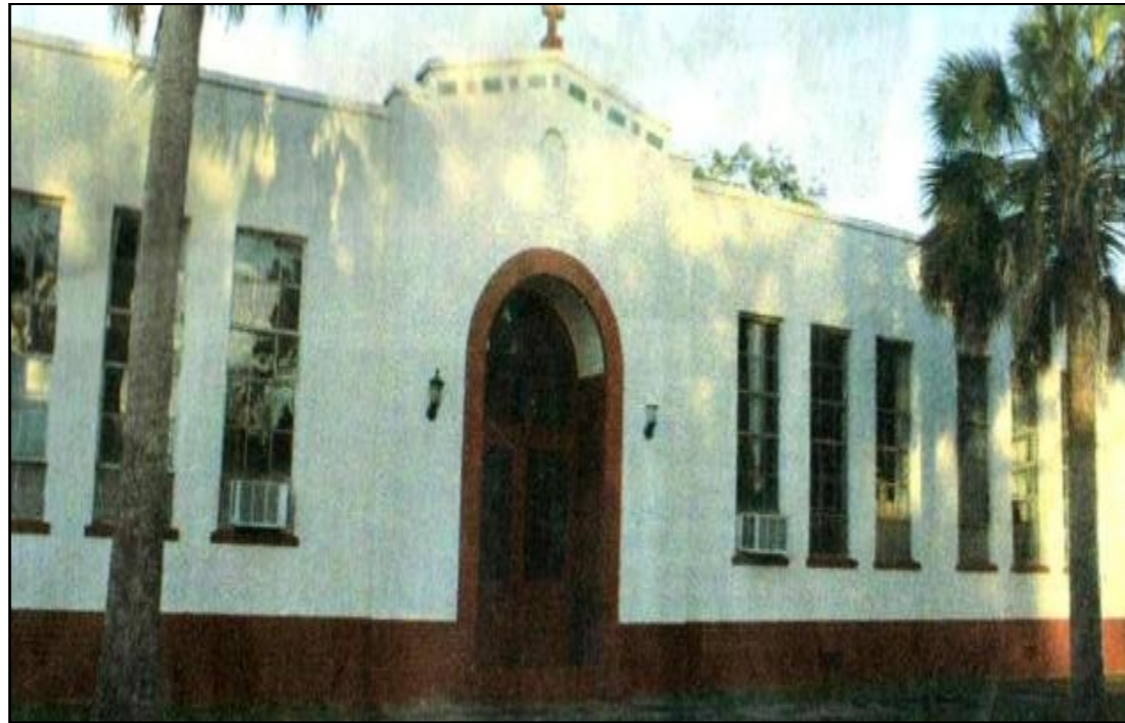
The grants are part of \$10 million in grants, for amounts of up to \$2 million each, authorized by the 2008 Legislature. The grants will be used for new construction, repairs and maintenance at senior centers around the state. A similar round of grants totaling \$9.1 million also was awarded during the 2007-08 fiscal year.

The city of Apalachicola used Florida Forever money, targeted for water reuse, to obtain the Holy Family building four years ago from the archdiocese. The church closed the school in the late 1960s when it desegregated the Apalachicola Catholic community and then later kept the facility open as a community center until it no longer could be operated safely.

Over the last four years the city has redoubled its efforts to secure funding to preserve and revive the center, working closely with Bert Ivey, who directs the county's Elder Care of Franklin County program, currently headquartered in Carrabelle.

The latest proposal includes a component devoted to African-American cultural history, of which the Holy Family Center was an integral part dating back to 1920, when African-American nuns from New Orleans first came to town to operate the Holy Family School.

"When I got the grant news I was excited," said Apalachicola Mayor Van Johnson, who himself attended the school up through the third grade.



BUILDING REVIVAL: The Holy Family Center soon will become a senior center.

Holy Family revival

"This is something the city has long been needing, a dedicated facility where seniors can congregate without being interrupted," he said.

Johnson said because the center is spacious, there will be enough room to incorporate a cultural history component.

"There'll be displays on the wall, and they'll probably have an office space, but not all details have been worked out," said Cindy Giametta, the city's grant writer.

She said the paperwork probably won't be signed with the state before January, and then it likely will be at least the fall before work will start on the project, which involves a complete renovation. Until then, she said, the center is neither safe enough nor handicap accessible to be used.

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roof over the sanctuary but beyond that, the building will need to be made handicap accessible, completion of the new roof, all new electrical and plumbing work, an addition for kitchen facilities, and parking, as well as several interior design modifications.

Giametta said the community will be able to rent out the sanctuary portion for private affairs as well.

"We're real excited about it," she said. "It's a big asset for the city. Really for the county, not just the city."

Johnson said he would like to see the work go to local contractors and tradesmen, and described the new senior center as the first piece of a plan to also create a dedicated youth center.

He said the city has been in talks with school district officials to obtain use of the Apalachicola High School gymnasium for a youth center.

The new senior center, at 203 Seventh

Street, will house such services as care management planning, Meals on Wheels, congregate meals prepared on site, activities, in-home care giving, homemaking services, respite care, caregiver assistance, adult day care and information and referral services.

"One of the most important things we can do for Florida's seniors is to provide the means for them to stay active and involved in their communities," said Elder Affairs Secretary Beach. "These grants will make an important difference in the lives of countless older Floridians."

Senior centers receiving the state grants will be required to provide at least a 25-percent match, bringing the total value of the projects to a minimum of \$12.5 million. In addition to construction of the three new senior centers, allowable expenditures include repairs and renovations for such items as ramps, automatic door openers, elevator controls, and fire or security systems, as well as major energy-related renovations such as lighting systems, roof repair and window replacement.

An estimated 380,000 seniors visit Florida's 240 senior centers each year. More information on Florida's senior centers is available at <http://elderaffairs.state.fl.us/english/seniorcenter.php>.