



Charles Auer/Freeman Staff

Wisconsin Lt. Gov. Rebecca Kleefisch speaks on stage to La Casa de Esperanza Executive Director Anselmo Villarreal, foreground, recounting how he had told her about his vision for the charter school on the site where ground was being broken for the new building.



Anselmo Villarreal, Marcos Ramos, Rick Congdon and Jenni Zielke are assisted by La Casa de Esperanza Charter School students during a groundbreaking for the new school building on Thursday.



Ground was broken for the new La Casa de Esperanza Charter School building by members of the organization's "50 years, 50 heroes" group of people who were crucial in the organization's success, including donors, volunteers, staff and community members.

La Casa breaks ground on charter school expansion

By Lauren Anderson
Freeman Staff

WAUKESHA — Construction didn't take a break on La Casa de Esperanza's campus Thursday morning even as community members gathered to commemorate it.

With an excavator working in the background, La Casa held a groundbreaking ceremony for its new charter school expansion aimed at accommodating future enrollment growth.

The three-story, 11,500-square-foot addition to its Arcadian Avenue facility will extend north along Caroline Street, the first in a three-part planned expansion.

The ceremony was the kickoff for current students' first day of school, and the launch of the charter school's second year.

"Today is an important day for La Casa de Esperanza because we reiterate our commitment to low-income children, our pledge to provide the best education possible to our low-income children," La Casa CEO and President Anselmo Villarreal said. "It is important to reduce, to eradicate the educational achievement gap.

And Waukesha is not exempt from having a significant educational achievement gap, particularly between low-income children and more affluent children."

The school offers extra services aimed at addressing the challenges low-income families experience regarding education — including before- and after-school care and summer programming to keep students learning in the off-school months.

La Casa is an independent public charter school authorized by the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. Though publicly funded, the school is not associated with a public school district.

This year, La Casa is celebrating its 50th anniversary. In addition to running the new school, the organization offers various services, including financial literacy, workforce development, tax assistance, food services, youth arts, and weatherization services for low-income families.

During Wednesday's ceremony, 50 "heroes" from throughout the organization's history were honored, including its founders Duane and Carol Warren,



An excavator digs the basement for the new school as the groundbreaking ceremony continues.

Kenneth and Clair Crouch, and Duane and Pat Mitchell. A host of dignitaries attended, including Wisconsin Lt. Gov. Rebecca Kleefisch and Attorney General Brad Schimel.

12 more classrooms planned in first phase

The first phase of construction will involve building 12 additional classrooms, which are expected to be completed in time for the 2017-18 school year.

After that, Villarreal has said, it would likely be more than two years before phase two — finishing construc-

tion of the elementary school classrooms — could begin. Phase three — building a middle school — would then begin three more years after that.

In addition to the \$3.5 million price tag for the three-story addition, Villarreal has said he expects to spend an additional \$2 million on phase two and between \$2.5 and \$3 million on phase three — for a total cost around \$7.5 million.

Enrollment is anticipated to reach 600 students within seven years.

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