

Business Notes

KATHY McCABE

Firms back children's agency

Children's Friend and Family Services of Salem runs on the motto "Helping Kids to Grow Up Strong." Now the nonprofit mental health service provider is looking for friends, including local businesses, foundations and individuals, to raise \$1.3 million to keep it financially strong.

Money donated will help pay for a new 12,000-square-foot main office the agency will move to on May 7 at the old Endicott School on Boston Street, near the Peabody line. The new headquarters will include expanded clinical space, educational center, meeting rooms, and administrative offices, officials said.

"It's a building that will serve our growth needs well into the future," said **Stephen Schaffer**, president of Children's Friend and Family Service.

With about 5,000 clients in Essex County, Children's Friend is one of the largest providers of mental health services for children and families in Northeastern Massachusetts, Schaffer said. Counseling is the largest single service provided by the organization, founded in Salem in 1837. It also has clinical offices in Amesbury, Gloucester, Haverhill, Lawrence, and Lynn.

The organization also runs the Juvenile Court Clinic for Essex County, evaluating about 400 cases each year in Salem, Lynn, Newburyport, and Lawrence. It also runs the day care and teenage parenting program at Salem High School. Separately, Children's Friend also runs a youth-mentor program, in which adults volunteer to be a friend to at-risk youth, Schaffer said.

Children's Friend has an annual budget of \$5 million. Its 120 staff members include social workers, psychiatrists, nurses, and counselors. The staff now operates out of cramped space in a red-brick building bought 50 years ago on Bridge Street in Salem. The building is in the process of being sold, with net proceeds going to the capital campaign, officials said.

So far, about \$420,000 has been raised, with donations coming from more than 40 organizations and individuals. "We've found people to be very responsive and generous," Schaffer said.

Top donors include the Eastern Bank Charitable Foundation; the GE Good Neighbors Fund; the Harold T.N. Smith Memorial Foundation, which honors the founders of the former Salem Oil and Grease Co.; and a longtime friend who has asked to remain anonymous.

Children's Friend is making an aggressive pitch to historic donors, but also hopes to tap new donors, particularly those with a heart for children's causes.

"We've been around since 1837," Schaffer said. "We're a solid, stable organization in this community."