



FATHER AND SON CHALLENGE NATURE

Paddle 300 miles of Florida's
open water **PAGE 18A**



ADDING ART, FITNESS TO MIX

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FAMILY CENTER **PAGE 10A**

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A rendering of The Jilk Family Center, which broke ground in February as part of the educational nonprofit Grace Place for Children and Families in Naples. SUBMITTED.

GRACE PLACE

to add art and fitness programs

Nonprofit broke ground on Jilk Family Center in February

Ashley Collins Naples Daily News
USA TODAY NETWORK - FLORIDA

As the need for early education grows, so is Grace Place for Children & Families in Golden Gate.

In February, the nonprofit broke ground on its sixth building situated on a 5-acre campus, with a goal to provide more educational programs to low-income families living in the East Naples community.

Plans for the Jilk Family Center — named after its donors, Patricia and Craig Jilk — revolve around arts and fitness, according to Mario Valle, board chair at Grace Place.

“A lot of our buildings already provide strong academic support,” Valle said. “With the new facility, we want to build enrichment through physical activity, art and music and take children that have a limited exposure to that and begin to expand their horizons.”

The 13,300 square foot facility, which is tentatively scheduled to open in December, will offer art and music programs as well as recreational activities.

The new facility won’t just offer new programs, but also help alleviate the center’s increasing space issues, said Barbara Evans, the center’s chief development officer.

Currently, Grace Place serves more than 600 families. In order to meet demand, Evans said, the Jilk Family Center is crucial.



Families pick out gifts for their children inside the Christmas store at Grace Place for Children and Families on Dec. 19, 2017. Grace Place helped provide about 800 children a Merry Christmas. ASHLEY COLLINS/STAFF

The new building will serve as storage space and house the center’s food pantry, which is currently running out of the chapel.

“It will give us all the necessary pieces to grow our programs to capacity,” Evans said.

It also will be the last building built on campus and any future expansion would involve looking at a second campus.

The center’s constant growth shows its impact in the community, Valle said.

“We’re no longer a secret. People are starting to recognize that we’re there and are starting to understand our family literacy model,” said Valle.

With the family literacy model, children and parents receive educational support via numerous programs, including School Age, Adult Education and Bright Beginnings.

To top it off, Valle said they hope to use the Jilk Family Center as a recovery shelter in the event of a natural disaster. Last year, Hurricane Irma pummeled Florida, and Golden Gate was no exception.

“We can still see scars in our community from Irma,” he said.

While the center continues to help families who need assistance, Valle said they want to be ready in case another disaster strikes, and the Jilk center would help with that.

For more information about Grace Place, visit www.graceplacenaples.org/.

Families enjoy a fun day of food and games at Grace Place For Children & Families in East Naples on Sept. 21, 2017. The free event served to bring a sense of normalcy to families following Hurricane Irma. ASHLEY COLLINS/STAFF

