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Boys & Girls Club opening new center, focusing on careers

By Joe Lawlor, jlawlor@dailypress.com | 247-7874

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— In between playing table tennis, pool and foosball, managers of the new Crossroads Village Boys & Girls Club location want members to learn about careers.

The new 10,000 square-foot building on Nettles Drive, which opened this week, is also the home to the Workforce Development Center and Career Café.

Steven Kast, president and CEO of the Boys & Girls Club of the Virginia Peninsula, said while club mainstays like games, activities and food will be at the new club, career exploration will be a cornerstone of the new venture.

Children will learn about interviewing and resume skills, and be mentored by professionals, he said. They will learn about how to seek work and learn a trade, either at the club or on site. The club held its grand opening on Wednesday.

"A lot of times, kids will leave the Boys & Girls Club at age 18, and then they just kind of flounder around for a while," Kast said. "This is completing the circle."

Not all of the Boys & Girls Club members are going to college, so they are emphasizing learning trade skills, such as electrical, plumbing or cooking, Kast said.

The non-profit organization paid \$90,000 to renovate the building, which formerly was Safehaven, a group home for foster children. Safehaven closed in 2009. Kast said it would have cost about \$350,000, but the labor was donated.

The building will also house the Peninsula Academy for Autism, a private school for children with autism. Kast said both agencies were interested in the building.

Nosuk Kim, one of the founders of the autism academy, said she hopes they can open by spring, for about 30 students. She said it would be the first private autism school for the Peninsula, and would have a student-teacher ratio of 2-1.

"We feel like there's a need for a private school," said Kim, explaining that the public schools do not provide as much one-on-one interaction that autistic students need.

About the clubs

The Boys & Girls Club of the Virginia Peninsula opened the Crossroads Village club this week including a Workforce Development Center and Career Café. The club is the 14th on the Peninsula, including nine in Newport News. The other clubs are located in Hampton, Williamsburg and in York, Mathews and Gloucester counties.

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