

Construction Continues on Western Youth Networks New Building

Nearly a year after breaking ground, Western Youth Network's 18,280 square-foot building project is making progress, moving closer to expanding the organization's youth services to the community.

"We had a couple of unexpected challenges with the soil and weather, but as it is now, we are hoping for a summer 2027 opening date," said WYN Executive Director Jennifer Warren.

She said this new building project was not only an organizational need, but a community need as well.

Organizationally, WYN had outgrown its space in terms of number of kids they could serve and staff capacity as well, she said.

"Alongside that, our community had been advocating for a youth center for probably 30 to 40 years at that point," Warren said.

Pediatrician Bill Horn was one of the biggest advocates for this type of center before his passing in 2005, because Warren said he knew that kids needed a safe place to recreate and to be active and who just didn't have that.

WYN's new building project depends on reaching its fundraising goal to ensure that they remain on track for an opening date next summer.

The total cost of the entire project is more than \$11 million, which includes the purchase of two properties for the admin and youth center, building renovations, and the youth center's construction.

As of now, WYN has raised \$9 million but needs to raise \$2.5 million more to finish the project debt free so they can turn all fundraising attention to programmatic expansion.

According to Warren, the Watauga Economic Development Commission conducted a study and saw a need for 1,600 plus seats just for after school and out of school time care.

“So we know that the community need is there and this facility will allow us to expand some of that need,” Warren said. “After what has now become probably 50 years of trying, it's going to be real and we're going to be the cohort of the people who did it.”

She said she is excited to see the benefits this new project will have to students and families, and she hopes that more parents will feel like they have a safe place for their kids to go while they work.

“I would just really encourage people to get involved because this project is going to make such a huge difference and I want people to feel connected to the difference that it makes,” Warren said.

To learn more about WYN and to support the fundraiser, visit www.westernyouthnetwork.org

