

Campus to help troubled boys

By Ann Weaver, Staff Writer

One never knows who might walk through the doors at White Fields.

It could be a future school teacher or an aspiring professional baseball player. A child who might be governor one day could find his calling at White Fields, said Trent Ward, co-founder of the home for troubled boys.

After seven years of dreaming and planning, Ward's idea for a boys' home has become reality. The sprawling, 160-acre campus 7 miles west of Edmond will open Wednesday.

Ward's aspirations for the boys who will live there are the same as those he has for his own sons, ages 2 and 3.

"We want them to know that they have a purpose in life," Ward said. "We want to help them reach their potential and know there are good people in the world that love them."

Ward and his father, Chesapeake Energy Corp. co-founder Tom Ward, have worked to raise money and find the right professionals to develop a unique program to help abused and neglected children.

White Fields is licensed through the state Department of Human Services to house as many as 10 boys who fit the department's "D+" classification. Officials are planning to add more capacity in the near future.

DHS Director Howard Hendricks said children in that category require 24-hour monitoring and innovative care and treatment plans.

The boys who arrive at White Fields will be referrals from DHS and other agencies, White Fields Executive Director Mary Jones said.

Jones said the children will receive schooling, counseling and mentoring. As the boys progress, they will be moved to less-restrictive living situations on campus and eventually to specialized community homes that White Fields professionals oversee.

There also will be independent living programs for older children, she said.

Jones said if boys regress, staff members will know and subsequently move boys within the program to get them the assistance they need. She said that's an advantage White Fields' all-inclusive program has over others that treat children only for short periods.

Ward said that most of all, the program offers stability, an asset that many of the children in the child welfare system lack.

"This is going to be an extended family," Ward said. "It's our hope that when they are 20 years removed from White Fields, that they still want to return for Christmas."

Already on the campus are three residential cottages, an administration building and two multipurpose rooms. Additional cottages, a playground, basketball court, animal barns, a walking trail and campgrounds are part of future plans.

Tim Smith of Ton Construction said the ranch-style buildings were designed to look like homes, but they have all the necessary commercial features, like sprinkler systems to prevent fires.

He said each bedroom has its own bathroom with a shower. There are mud rooms where the boys can leave their coats and dirty shoes after a day at school or a camping trip, he said.

Smith said a lot of the contractors donated their time and labor when they found out it would be a home for troubled boys.

Others have contributed to making the boys feel at home once they arrive.

Women at New Covenant Christian Church made bright-colored quilts for the boys' beds.

Blair Schoeb, a member of the United Methodist Church of the Servant in Oklahoma City, said they purchased sheets, comforters, towels and pillows. They have plans to provide personalized Bibles for each resident and are anticipating the need for mentors and tutors.

"We couldn't take these kids home with us, so we created a home for them," Ward said.

"They will be like our own."



BY PAUL B. SOUTHERLAND, THE OKLAHOMAN

Left: Two of the cottages at White Fields, a boys home that opens Wednesday in western Oklahoma County.



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Above:

White Fields staff attends a recent training session inside a living space on the boys home campus.