

THE BAKERSFIELD

Community center in Oildale apartment complex to offer services for residents

By: Maureen Strode

September 6, 2019

A new community center built within a low-income apartment complex in Oildale will serve as a "resource point" for residents and community members alike.

That's according to Tom Collishaw, CEO of Self-Help Enterprises, an organization dedicated to community development in Kern County. The Stan Keasling Community Center, named after a national leader in housing and community development, was spearheaded by the organization after it recognized the complex's residents needed a place for a new after-school program, digital literacy classes, health and wellness programs and English as a Second Language courses.



Self-Help Enterprises CEO Tom Collishaw addresses the crowd inside the Stan Keasling Community Center.

But the center will also allow local organizations to use the space. The Farmworkers Institute for Education and Leadership Development and Community Action Partnership of Kern have already booked the space for their meetings and events, said Patrick Isherwood, program director for the Self-Help Enterprises. Community partners may use the space for their own health fairs and clinics, digital literacy and ESL classes that will be open to the entire community.

The focus of the Stan Keasling Community Center is "perseverance and promise," according to Collishaw, who spoke at the center's grand opening Friday morning. Keasling's nonprofit, Rural Community Assistance Corporation, made it possible for the center to be built, Collishaw said. As a "pioneer of infrastructure and community development," it was an easy decision to name the center after Keasling, Collishaw said.

"It's really humbling to be associated with a place of learning and opportunity," Keasling said.

A kitchen, computer lab, laundry room and office space is available for residents, as well as a large communal room with bright yellow and white walls. Blue armchairs, a desk and other communal seating is available for kids to do their homework after school in a safe place, said Leighann Clark, apartment site manager.

"This community center is a blessing," Clark said as her eyes welled up with tears. "We're gonna wear it down."



Self-Help Enterprises Asset Manager Nereyda Duarte, far left, and Project Manager Vanesa Donangtavangh, present Leighann and Charles Clark with an award. Leighann Clark is the apartment site manager at North Park Apartments and Charles Clark is the contractor who oversaw construction of the Stan Keasling Community Center.



Stan Keasling and Leighann Clark cut the ribbon in front of the Stan Keasling Community Center in Oildale.