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# Friendship Foundation to open \$36 million campus in Redondo Beach

The campus will prepare special needs adults to join the workforce



Friendship Foundation to open \$36 million campus in Redondo Beach

By **MICHAEL HIXON** | mhixon@scng.com | The Beach Reporter

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After operating for 15 years from various school and community facilities, Friendship Foundation will develop a 3.25-acre property owned by the Redondo Beach Unified School District at a cost of \$36 million, said Nina Patel, the nonprofit's managing director.

The campus, at 850 S. Inglewood Ave., will include a new 55,000-square-foot building and existing buildings there will be demolished, said Patel. The property is the site of the former Franklin Elementary School which closed in the 1980s. It has most recently been rented to a private preschool.

The Friendship Foundation campus, slated to be completed in the fall of 2022, is designed to assist special needs young adults with vocational training and job placement to help them become part of the workforce.

Eight out of every 10 individuals with disabilities in America are unemployed, said Patel; it's a potential workforce that could contribute to the economy, but those with special needs are lacking in training opportunities.

The Friendship Foundation education campus plans to address that need with vocational and job training programs than span the gamut from technology to landscaping.

For example, a Creative Center will feature a state-of-the art studio with training in digital media, visual arts and music. The Culinary Arts Center and its Friendship Cafe and Teaching Kitchen will offer training in the hospitality and culinary industries.

The campus will also include a recreation center containing adaptive equipment for basketball, rock climbing wall, pickleball, dance and martial arts classes. In addition, in keeping with its mentoring model, the new campus will begin a multigenerational mentoring program, in which older adults can impart life skills and professional experiences.

And, that's the idea, said Patel. The Friendship Foundation campus is for anyone who wants to help the special needs community.

"It's going to be a community integrated facility, very inclusive," Patel said. "We want to include seniors in the community, of course we already include our student volunteers. It is going to be a community-driven center with a special emphasis for giving opportunities with individuals with special needs."



The Friendship Foundation was founded 15 years ago with a Sunday Circle program, which focused on eight children with special needs with 22 teen volunteers, by Rabbi Yossi Mintz and the Jewish Community Center Chabad of the South Bay.

“We’ve learned a tremendous amount serving our special needs community since 2005, working with 10 school districts, numerous partners and hundreds of participants to create integrated programs,” Mintz said in a press release.

“The children who started with us 15 years ago have become young adults and are now asking for help finding gainful employment,” wrote Mintz. “Each and every one of us wants a purpose in life and a way to contribute to society. That’s what our new campus is all about.”

Superintendent Steven Keller said his RBUSD team was excited about the partnership with the Friendship Foundation.

“Although we have plenty of work ahead of us, the end result will be truly transformative for many Redondo Beach and South Bay residents,” Keller said.

Patel said \$27 million of the estimated cost of \$36 million has already been committed through various donors. They will continue to fundraise until they reach the \$36 million goal.

With the pandemic resulting in safe at home orders in March, Patel said there was some concern the fundraising efforts would be hampered. She was relieved that wasn’t the case.

“We were so nervous that some of our pledged commitments would not come through and people might back off,” Patel said, adding that even donors who had pledged \$1 million still said they would honor their commitments.

“We’ve been blessed,” Patel said.

For more information, visit [friendshipfoundation.com](https://friendshipfoundation.com).

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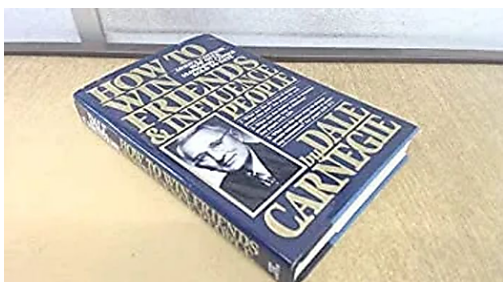
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Michael Hixon, a community journalist since 1996, is a reporter at The Beach Reporter who covers Hermosa Beach and well as business, feature and entertainment news. He also has written extensively about Hollywood movies and film festivals and met or interviewed more directors and celebrities than he can count.

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