

## Editorial: Army marches on fairgrounds

### **Community center holds promise: Whatever happens, or doesn't, with the fairgrounds redesign, the Kroc Center should not be delayed.**

By Staff Reports

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Reasons to delay signing an agreement to redevelop the Mid-South Fairgrounds keep piling up at City Hall.

This week's reason revolves around Shelby County's ownership of 40 percent of the Mid-South Coliseum and a parcel of land beneath Liberty Bowl Memorial Stadium.

Fortunately, that doesn't legitimately stand in the way of The Salvation Army's plan to build a 100,000-square-foot, open-to-the-public community center on about 15 acres of fairgrounds property just south of Fairview Middle School. City officials would like the charity to trade its 15 acres to the city and locate somewhere else, but The Salvation Army likes the highly visible, highly accessible spot and fears that moving would jeopardize its funding.

The charity is about \$4 million shy of breaking ground on its planned Kroc Center, a space for religious gatherings as well as state-of-the-art facilities for recreation, social services, the arts, community groups, fitness and other activities. The center holds much promise as a unifying nexus for diverse neighborhoods on all sides of the fairgrounds.

The \$25 million construction project is being financed and the center's activities will be funded in large part by \$25 million in local donations and a \$50 million matching grant from the estate of McDonald's heiress Joan Kroc.

Kroc donated a total of \$1.56 billion to The Salvation Army to build and operate community centers in diverse neighborhoods across the country.

Memphis is one of 30 cities that has been offered the opportunity to participate in the program. Kroc Center fundraisers are only \$4 million short of their mandatory \$25 million goal.

Most important, they have purchased the land they need for the center and have developed an impressive set of plans for how it will be used.

"We're moving forward to get this money raised, and we're going to be ready this summer,"

Salvation Army area commander Maj. Mark Woodcock said.

While the organization has a "cooperative spirit," he said, it has worked hard to get as far as it has gotten on the project and has no desire to delay.

Nor should it. Any delay by The Salvation Army would represent missed opportunities to make a difference in the lives of young Memphians who are deciding what direction to take their lives in.

For a lot of good reasons, the project deserves the support of donors and the public.

It's beginning to look like redevelopment of the fairgrounds might be a distant dream.

The Kroc Center can become a reality quite soon.



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