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Future Day Camp: An artist's rendering of the YMCA's proposed Day Camp facility on Kenyon Road shows the ropes course, ball fields, amphitheater and other amenities that officials say will make the place a hit for area children.

YMCA starts work on day camp

By [R.E. Spears III \(Contact\)](#) | Suffolk News-Herald

Published Wednesday, July 7, 2010

If all goes as planned, by this time next year, the Kenyon Road former home of the Hampton Roads Youth Center will ring once again with the sound of children playing.

Having spent \$1.9 million in June to buy the 55-acre site of the now-defunct residential program for troubled youth, the YMCA of South Hampton Roads has kicked off a campaign to raise another \$1.2 million to turn the property into a regional day camp and family center.

Renovations already are under way inside the 10,000-square-foot building on the property, and YMCA officials expect that the work outside will be done in time for weeklong day camps to be held next summer.

"We are really excited about this," said Charles E. Harris, president and CEO of the YMCA of South Hampton Roads, an umbrella organization that includes YMCA facilities in Suffolk and Franklin. "For us to be able to do this in Suffolk, where we already have a great Y, is really wonderful. This is going to be a first-class facility."

The organization plans a traditional full-day summer-camp experience for up to 400 boys and girls aged 5 to 15 per week, according to communications director Brendan Ash.

Organizers expect the experience to include a new "spray-park" pool, camp songs, environmental education, family nights, conservation awareness and archery, along with other hands-on activities in a camp garden and forested area.

There will be softball and soccer fields, a climbing tower and ropes course over a pond, a pavilion building, group shelters and even an amphitheater, according to plans the organization has begun to release in support of its fundraising efforts.

"This is a great location to draw kids and families," from as far away as Franklin and Western Branch, Harris said, noting that the organization hopes to build a similar facility in Chesapeake that would serve the core cities of Tidewater.

The move toward building day camps is a reaction to the "huge demand" the YMCA experiences for its summer programs, he said. Each of the region's YMCAs offers summer camp programs that fill up very quickly, he added, and those programs will continue to be offered, even after the new day camps are opened.

Kenyon Road would offer parents an alternative to the programs offered at the regular facilities, he said.

And during the non-summer months, the new facility would be available for use by families, companies, churches and civic groups that might wish to use some or all of the amenities.

The main building, which could be complete in August, will be a prime spot for community organizations looking for a place to meet, Harris said. And as work progresses on that building, officials are putting out the word that they need to raise the rest of the money to complete the property.

Harry Cross is heading up the capital campaign, he said, and naming rights are being offered for everything from the main building to the archery range. The Birdsong Trust already has donated \$100,000, Harris added.

"We are very confident that the community is going to help with this effort," he said.
