

Extra Extra

Organization receives much-needed facelift from actress



AbilityFirst of Claremont has received a special makeover this month thanks to actress and designer Jaclyn Smith and "Extra TV."

"The new show 'Extra' did a piece featuring Jaclyn's furniture, which decorated the show's set," said Lori Gargano, president of the organization. "They thought it would be a good idea to donate the furniture."

Ms. Smith, a long-time volunteer with the organization, knew where the furniture should go.

"[Extra] called to tell us that Jaclyn Smith chose AbilityFirst," Steve Recoratal, a public relations representative for the organization, said. "We had to choose how best to use this gift."

The Claremont center of the organization is roughly 40 years old and was in desperate need of a facelift, Ms. Gargano said.

The center opened in 1965, and about 200 people a day walk through the lobby. The center sees more than 450 people total for programs such as adult agencies, their Friday night programs, and children's after-school programs, Ms. Gargano said.

"We have agencies for senior citizens who have arthritis," said Gertrude Casero, director of Claremont's AbilityFirst. "We service just over 300 volunteers with various and identifiable type of disabilities, and somewhere around 500 people from Claremont and its surrounding areas."

Ms. Smith, who has been involved with the organization for 25 years, was present at the redecoration in Wednesday. Children from the organization helped Ms. Smith and the redesign team with the painting and placing of a garden.

"I was thrilled when they let me redecorate their lobby and to give them something back for once," Ms. Smith said in a press release. "The fact that we're able to include the children in the process makes this project even more special."

The redesign will include furniture from the Jaclyn Smith Home for Largo's Heritage Collection and Jaclyn Smith Home Collection for Hickory Hill. It will encompass the 5 main areas of AbilityFirst's main lobby, including the main entryway, waiting room, reception area, corridor and the quiet room.

"Extra" camera crews were present to shoot a segment that will air on a later date. For information on when the segment will air, visit the "What's New" section at www.jaclynsmith.com.

Celebrating their 88th anniversary.

ABILITYFirst page

Natalie Wobber, 24, talks with former "Charlie's Angels" star Jaclyn Smith, 58, in the lobby of AbilityFirst Wednesday. Ms. Smith donated items from her home design line to the organization's Claremont headquarters.

COURIER photo/Trish Branley

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ABOVE: Jaclyn Smith is interviewed by "Extra" in the lobby of AbilityFirst. LEFT: AbilityFirst students created artwork to help redecorate, some of which is included in the "fishbowl" room.

ABILITY

Continued from cover.

AbilityFirst started in 1926 as the California Crippled Children's Society and was renamed AbilityFirst in 1999. They offer various programs and services that aim to help both children and adults with physical and developmental disabilities live full and rich lives.

"We like to focus on people ability and this redesign fits in with that philosophy," Ms. Gargani said.

—Nick Cooper

For a color photo gallery of AbilityFirst's makeover, visit www.diamond-courier.com.