

Parkmerced children's center wins reprieve from eviction

It gets one year to find a new home

By Sonia Mansfield

NEIGHBORHOOD REPORTER

A child-care center in the Parkmerced apartment complex near San Francisco State University got a stay of execution from its landlord last week, after the protests of angry parents and pointed attention from city officials and the media.

The Carmel Companies, a Colorado-based real-estate firm that owns the expansive Parkmerced housing complex, decided to postpone evicting the Montessori Children's Center for one year and agreed to negotiate with the child-care center's owner and help find a new location.

On May 10, the Carmel Companies issued an eviction notice to the Montessori Children's Center, giving it until June 30 to vacate the property where it has been operating for 24 years.

But Joe Bravo, a lawyer representing the Carmel Companies, offered an olive branch to the school during a meeting last week that was filled with about 125 angry parents and representatives of state and local lawmakers. By the time of the meeting, the news of the eviction had already been the subject of stories in newspapers and on television.

"I am so thankful for this wonderful opportunity to sit at the

table together and try to work out a mutual agreement," said Judith Flynn, owner of the Montessori Children's Center. "But nothing is in concrete until it is in writing."

Bravo denied that the one-year extension had anything to do with the city and media support thrown behind the school. He said that the Carmel Companies reconsidered its decision after receiving letters from parents, who wrote that their children would have no place to go after the closure because most schools in the city have already finished their enrollment process.

"[Due to the letters], the school got a reprieve in order to give parents time to enroll their children elsewhere," said Bravo. "I

can assure you it wasn't the calls of city officials."

But the eviction shouldn't have come as such a shock, Bravo insisted. He said Carmel and the school had been discussing an eviction since late February, and blamed Flynn for the panic caused by the eviction notice.

The company had been considering a request for an extension of the eviction date, he said, but parents didn't find out until May about the eviction — too late to enroll their children in other schools.

"Maybe this all could have been avoided if the [center's] owner had talked with the parents," said Bravo.

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Site search still on for Leadership High District, school at impasse

By Sonia Mansfield

NEIGHBORHOOD REPORTER

The search for a temporary home for one of the city's top-ranked schools remains stalled as the school's administrators and the San Francisco Unified School District argue about where to put the school, which has lost its lease.

Leadership High School administrators met with the school board's Buildings, Grounds, and Services Committee last week to discuss possible sites for Leader-

ship High, whose property lease with Golden Gate University expires June 10. However, neither side was able to agree on what school district site would be the best temporary home for the school for three years while it searches for a permanent site.

"I feel, in some way, that we're back to square one," said school board member Juanita Owens. "I was hoping that we would make some progress, but I'm not con-

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PHOTO: RORY McNAMARA

Teacher Courtney Monroe helps children string beads at the Montessori Children's Center. The center recently gained a year-long reprieve from the eviction it faced last month.

CHILDREN'S CENTER: Reprieve

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Reasons for eviction

Bravo said he doesn't know what new negotiations will bring, but he doubted that Montessori Children's Center would remain at the Parkmerced location beyond the one-year extension date. The building occupied by the center is approximately 50 years old and does not meet current building codes for a preschool, Bravo said.

"[Carmel Companies] doesn't want a school in a building that wasn't designed for it," said Bravo. "It was designed as a recreation center."

Kathy Wright, whose 4-year-old

daughter Jessica is a student at the center, said that while the extension is appreciated, the eviction is still unwarranted. The building may not have been designed for a child-care center in plan, she said, but after 24 years it is a child-care center in fact.

"Why can't we just stay there? There's no good reason why the school has to leave," said Wright. "The school has been at the same place for 24 years, so why now is the child-care center a liability?"

Flynn said that although she is relieved about the extension, she is still concerned that one year is not enough time to relocate the child-care center, given the tight real-estate market in the city.

"The negotiations are a great

first step, but one year is not enough time. I think we need at least two years," said Flynn. "But even with two years, there's no guarantee that we would be able to find a place and bring it up to code. I just know we couldn't do all that in one year."

Many Montessori parents are concerned that when the one-year extension is up, the child-care center will be forced to relocate to another neighborhood.

"As a parent, I'm delighted to have another year, but that may not be enough time," said Wright. "We want it to stay in the community, but it may have to relocate to another community. I seems that, even with the extension, it's all very up in the air still."