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Restoring a piece of Hernando

By MICHAEL D. BATES Chronicle Reporter
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This sign, placed at the Historic Hernando School in 2001, tells the story of the building, built in 1941-1942.

Matthew Beck / Chronicle photo editor

County commissioners this month unanimously agreed in consensus to rent out the county-owned Historic Hernando Elementary School at 2435 N. Florida Ave. in Hernando to Club Recovery of Citrus County for \$1 a year on a five-year renewable contract.

The board plans to formally vote on the contract at an upcoming meeting.

The nonprofit is in the last year of its lease at its present location, and because of landlord expansion plans it was necessary to find a new home to conduct meetings. With 8,000 square feet at the school, it offered the ideal venue.

The plan is to occupy the school and manage the building for other related nonprofits that would also operate there.

Bill Antonen, president of Club Recovery, said his nonprofit will restore the historic building to its former state as much as possible. Through donations, Club Recovery will foot the bill for the restoration, estimated to take 10 years at a minimum of \$305,000.

Antonen said the school is part of the fabric of Hernando, a community that doesn't receive as much attention as Crystal River and Inverness.

"(The school) is a historic part of Citrus County," Antonen said. "It's bringing back something that will bring Hernando together."

Addiction, he said, is a "family disease" and there are many "underserved people in Hernando" who will benefit from this move.

Oscar Holmberg, vice president of Club Recovery, said he wants the historic school to once again be "the focal point of the community."

But to do that, Holmberg said, the lines of communication must be opened between all the county nonprofits. Often, they are so busy they don't talk to each other, he said.

Holmberg said once the facility is open and active, the members plan to look for another location on the west side of the county, perhaps Homosassa.

Restoring the pastThe Historic Hernando School was placed on the National Register of Historic Places on May 4, 2001, and it is the oldest historic public building in Hernando.

The land on the corner of Parsons Point Road and U.S. 41 on which the building resides was obtained through a U.S. government land grant awarded to Edward Croft in 1885.

Before it became the Historic Hernando School, many wooden schoolhouses preceded it. The current building was designed by architect Henry L. Taylor and was built between the years 1941 and 1942.

Due to its high level of craftsmanship, the school has become an architecturally significant building in the Hernando local area.

The building has been used by Citrus County Senior Services for numerous programs and activities, such as congregated dining meals, arts classes, Meals on Wheels distribution, and more.

Citrus County has owned the property since 1999, when the school district transferred ownership to the county.

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