

\$11M community center in Fortuna nearing completion

[Mary Bullwinkel](#) September 4, 2019 at 4:02 pm



The Gene Lucas Community Center in Fortuna is nearing completion, and representatives are excited about the centralized location for a variety of programs and services. (Mary Bullwinkel — For the Times-Standard)

The opening of the Gene Lucas Community Center in Fortuna is not far off. No specific date has been set, but it is expected to be in operation by late fall, possibly November.

In anticipation of the start-up, an Open House is planned to take place on Dec. 7. This will be a celebration not only of the new Gene Lucas Community Center, but also of the Mel & Grace McLean Foundation's 20th anniversary.

“This is why we are here today,” McLean Foundation executive director Denise Marshall said of Mel and Grace McLean.

A community center in the Eel River Valley has always been part of the McLeans' vision for the well-being of the local residents. The McLean

Foundation has so far invested \$11 million in the Gene Lucas Community Center and the rest of the development off Newburg Road in Fortuna.

“This is the biggest gift and biggest grant ever to this community (from the McLean Foundation),” Marshall said.

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The Gene Lucas Community Center is situated on a 37-acre piece of property and will house multiple organizations. The McLean Foundation and Fortuna Senior Services will be in each of the outside wings of the building, and Remi Vista Counseling Services will be in part of the upper story offices area.

“This will provide a centralized location for services,” Jennifer Brown, Gene Lucas Community Center Program and Outreach coordinator, said. “And it will be a central gathering place for Fortuna and the Eel River Valley.”

Construction of a new 16,000-square-foot home for the Humboldt Senior Resource Center is also underway on this property. The Humboldt Senior Resource Center will provide Program of All-Inclusive Care for Elderly and Adult Day Health services, and will be base its Meals on Wheels program in Fortuna, using the commercial kitchen at the community center.

The property includes five-and-one-half acres of wetlands, surrounded by over six acres of riparian restoration, and Strongs Creek to the south. A one-mile long trail will meander through the wetlands and connect to nearby Newburg Park. During recent meetings about the future of Newburg Park, the number one suggestion was more walking trails.

“This will provide a place to just come and be,” Marshall said, “and you can enjoy why we live here by being outdoors.”

Trail users will be able to see waterfowl in the winter and view Headwaters Forest from a distance. The first section of the trail will be Americans with

Disabilities Act accessible, as it passes by two special tree plantings. One will be an area of redwood trees dedicated to veterans, and the other will be a grove of flowering cherry trees, to be donated by the Fortuna Sunrise Rotary.

“There will be four varieties of flowering cherry trees,” Marshall said, “so there will be a staggered blooming season.”

She said she believes this grove of trees will become a destination point in the spring for the community to enjoy for many years.

The center will partner with other organizations to provide classes, programs and services in an effort to bring the community together. Community Partners with the Gene Lucas Community Center are College of the Redwoods Adult Education, Paso a Paso, First 5, U.C. Cooperative Extension, and English Express.

The classes, services and programs offered by the Eel River Valley Multi-Generational Center are also soon moving to the Gene Lucas Community Center from its current Newburg Road location just a half mile away

In addition to classes and programs, there is space that can be rented for events.

The McLean Foundation also recognized and expressed appreciation for past donors including Fortuna Grocery Outlet, Fat Anne’s Bistro and Bakery, Fortuna Ace Hardware, Forbusco Lumber, Safeway, and Coast Central Credit Union.