

Eco-friendly building fits right into Garfield Park

Bethel New Life's center is hub for many activities on West Side

BY GARY WISBY

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Much of the new life in spring is green, so it's fitting that Bethel New Life's new \$4.5 million center on the West Side is one of the greenest in Chicago.

From its roof — half plantings, half photovoltaic cells to capture solar energy — to its bridge to the CTA's Green Line, the two-story center at Lake and Pulaski qualifies for an unprecedented gold rating from the U.S. Green Building Council.

More about environmentally friendly features later. But Bethel Center, which officially opened Thursday, is also community-friendly. Intended as a hub of activity in Garfield Park, it offers employment services, day care, Head Start classes, a bank, dry cleaners and a sandwich shop.

Agitation, link to L station

Mary Nelson, president of Bethel New Life, the faith-based social service agency founded 26 years ago, said, "Rabble-rousing is how all of this started." Closing of the Green Line in 1994 was the impetus. The



Bethel New Life president Mary Nelson shows the environmentally friendly building, which will serve as a social service and commercial center. In the background is a CTA rapid transit station. —RICH HEIN/SUN-TIMES

agency joined with many partners — including Oak Park and six other western suburbs — to demand its return, and in the uproar the seeds for the new center were planted.

One result, Nelson said, was that "the Center for Neighborhood Technology introduced us to transit-oriented development." A brownfield site next to the L line was chosen,

and the renovated Pulaski stop includes a covered pedestrian bridge to the center's second floor. Travel by train, of course, is cleaner.

"An opportunity for our dollars to

stay here and be recirculated" is one of the center's offerings, said Jewel Mandeville of Bethel New Life's board.

In addition to the dry cleaners and a soon-to-open Subway sandwich shop, a branch of the 1st Bank of Oak Park will "bank the unbanked [to help] put currency exchanges out of business," said bank president Mike Kelly.

Energy-saving features

Designed by Chicagoarchitects Doug Farr and Kevin Pierce, the building is eligible for the building council's gold rating and would be the city's first to earn it. It should use only half as much energy as a conventional commercial building.

The green roof, planted with six kinds of sedum and five flowering plants, will lessen storm water runoff, heat absorption in summer and heat loss in winter. Other features include "super" insulation, further reduced heat absorption because of the building's beige color and shading from trees, a sophisticated heat recovery system and automatic light dimmers.

At least 25 percent of the building materials contain recycled content. Twenty percent of the materials were shipped from within 500 miles of Chicago, reducing the emission produced by transport. And half the wood used came from forests that are grown and harvested with environmentally friendly methods.