

# CRAIN'S DETROIT BUSINESS

Detroit and Southeast Michigan's premier business news and information website

December 18, 2011 8:00 PM

## St. John makes 'strategic' buy of former Fisher Center's 31 acres

By [Sherri Welch](#)

### **Fisher Center returns to roots**

After vacating its longtime home in Farmington Hills and getting out of the orphanage and foster care business, **St. Vincent Sara Fisher Center** has returned to Detroit and the mission it was founded on 160 years ago: providing education to at-risk children.

The center is providing customized tutoring after school and during the summer to help children overcome issues with comprehension and concentration so they can do better in school. It's also providing GED tutoring for their parents and other adults, from space at three Detroit-based nonprofits: **Focus: Hope, Neighborhood Service Organization** and **TWW & Associates**.

The big focus now in metro Detroit is on improving educational quality, said Diane Renaud, Executive Director of the Center. But to do that, "you have to attack the problem of generational deficiencies in education," because parents who didn't complete high school can't provide for their families, get a job or do homework with their children, said Renaud. She brings 25 years of experience in nonprofit and marketing management for organizations including **DMC Children's Hospital of Michigan** and **BBDO Detroit**.

Last year, the center raised just \$200,000 toward its \$800,000 budget and made up the difference from its unrestricted endowment -- which was \$7 million at the beginning of 2011 and is roughly \$7.5 million now -- as it has for the past several years. This year, the organization has operated on a budget of about \$700,000, raising about \$150,000 of that, Renaud said. "Ever since the organization was required to change what it was doing, fundraising kind of (fell) to a standstill ... We need to re-energize what has been a stagnant donor base."

St. Vincent and Sarah Fisher Center most recently served as a residential/foster care agency for children. In 2006, it closed its residential campus due to elimination of state funding. Rather than cease operating, the center's board of directors made a decision to return to its roots. The center works with about 220 adults and roughly 40 children at any given time.

Last week Renaud hired a development director to add to eight full-time and four part-time employees. She plans to add more staff as funds become available.

*St. Vincent Sarah Fisher Center may have to appeal to a new generation of donors, namely those whose parents supported the center in the past, said John Fike, president of **Philanthropy Solutions LLC** in Ypsilanti. That has to be done one person or family at a time, and it could very well be a long road back. But it's worth pursuing, Fike said.*