

Mini golf, indoors with a view

Winston Prouty hosts second annual fundraiser for first time as new owners of the Austine campus

By Olga Peters / *The Commons*

BRATTLEBORO—The Winston Prouty Center for Child Development staff will celebrate its new ownership of the Austine School campus with a mini golf tournament at Vermont Hall.

Winston Prouty hosts its second annual indoor Mini Golf Classic on Saturday, March 5, and Sunday, March 6. All community members are invited.

Adults are encouraged to wear their glamorous best to Saturday's tournament for grownups. The black-tie optional evening will feature light dinner fare and a cash bar. The tournament is from 6 to 9 p.m. Tickets are \$25 per person.

Sunday's family fun day will take place from 1:30 to 4:30 p.m. The cost is \$5 per person, or \$12 for a foursome if players bring their Saturday night scorecard.

Both events take place in Vermont Hall on the former Austine School campus in Brattleboro. The building overlooks Mount Wantastiquet.

The fundraiser kicks off the local nonprofit's capital campaign to renovate the first floor of Vermont Hall. Prouty is relocating its educational programs from its current location on Guilford Street.

Prouty Executive Director Chloe Learey said renovating the new space will cost approximately \$400,000.

Many of the updates are cosmetic, she said.

As the campus' steward, she added, "we want to make it a viable community resource again."

Approximately 75 people attended the mini golf fundraiser last year, Learey said. She said she hopes even more people will attend this weekend.

The Austine campus sat mostly vacant for a year before Prouty in January purchased the 117-acre campus for \$2.75 million. The former Vermont Center for the Deaf

and Hard of Hearing and Austine School declared bankruptcy two years ago.

Learey said Prouty purchased the property with hopes of collaborating with fellow mission-driven organizations looking to purchase space.

Details of how the collaborations would work are still under consideration. Learey said Prouty may launch something similar to a condominium association or sell the property building by building. The proceeds would reduce Prouty's own mortgage.

While some areas of the large campus are in preservation, she added, developable land is also available.

As ideas arise, she said, much depends on the organizations's abilities to marshal community support.

Prouty is not interested in being landlords, Learey said.

Instead, Learey said she's excited by the prospect of helping other organizations find affordable space that serves their needs and the needs of the wider community.

"That there's this greater good," she said. "We see this as a community project."

Approximately eight organizations rent space at the campus. VT Dinners, a frozen-meal service using locally grown and prepared ingredients, uses the school's fully equipped commercial kitchen. Learey said many organizations or small food producers could share that space.

Despite the campus' size Learey said she's not overwhelmed...yet.

"It would be so easy to be overwhelmed," she laughed. "There are little surprises that come up."

Learey said Prouty had the goof fortune to hire Facilities Manager Eric Annis, Austine's previous campus manager of nine years.

The Brattleboro Music Center will move into Prouty's former Guilford Street property when Prouty relocates this summer.

Winston Prouty Center for Child Development, incorporated in 1969, provides inclusive education and family support to promote the success of children and families.

For more information about the two-day Indoor Mini-Golf Classic, call Winston Prouty at 802-257-7852 or visit www.winstonprouty.org.