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Charter school adds 42 acres for middle school

Columbus Charter School Headmaster Steve Smith announced last week that a 42-acre tract at the southwest corner of Peacock and Old Lumberton roads has been acquired to ensure expansion room for the county's only charter school, now in its third year of operation.

Cramer and Mitchell at new charter site.

"Charter schools do not receive any funds for land or buildings so we are dependent upon outside help for our facilities," Smith said. "We rent our school property and buildings from Coastal Habitat Conservancy (CHC), and they have been very cooperative in buying this convenient tract across from the elementary school so we will have room for a middle school when conditions allow."

Baker Mitchell, managing partner for CHC, said that site planning for the middle school would begin as soon as possible. "There are no guarantees that in this rough economic climate funds can be found to build, but at least we will have a great site ready when funds do become available," Mitchell said. "The parents and community have been so welcoming to Mr. Smith and the school that I hope means can be found to keep the yearly grade additions moving ahead as scheduled," he added.

"I like the fact that you can challenge the kids with higher level material if you feel that they are ready for it," said parent Sheila Dockery. And parent Ginger Scott says she sends her three children to CCS "because of the structured environment" and the "behavioral standards … that reduce the distractions in the classroom."

Smith said that many other parents have positive comments on the year-round schedule and the traditional uniforms.

Smith said the tuition-free public charter school was the only school in the three-county area to achieve "School of Distinction" status with over 80 percent of the students testing at or above grade level on the state-wide achievement tests. "We try to make learning fun and ensure that every child experiences success as he or she moves through the curriculum," he said.

Columbus Charter School is a sister school with Charter Day School in Brunswick County which has 832 student in grades K-8. Both schools are operated by the Roger Bacon Academy under the overall direction of Superintendent Mark Cramer.

The Columbus school has grown to 363 students in grades kindergarten through fourth and is on track to add a fifth grade next year. All children are welcome and interested parents can tour the school or obtain more information by calling Smith or Crystal Morgan at 641-4042.