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Crosspoint has found a home on East Side

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Two weeks ago, Crosspoint Inc. quietly put a nagging legal challenge behind it.

In two months, the nonprofit will quietly celebrate the fifth anniversary of its East Side halfway house, at the site of an old Sisters of the Holy Spirit convent.

If the word “quietly” is the common thread here, that’s just the way Crosspoint CEO Kevin Downey likes it. After all, Crosspoint’s emergence on the East Side resulted in the most polarizing, vitriolic zoning battle this city has seen in the past 10 years.

Five-and-a-half years ago, former District 2 Councilwoman Sheila McNeil lamented in the pages of the San Antonio Express-News that the opening of the 100-bed East Side facility for transitioning former criminals would “mean the ruin of the entire inner-city community.”

Crosspoint rubbed the community’s emotions raw because it divided East Siders who argued that their community was being targeted for something the rest of the city wouldn’t want and Crosspoint admirers who lauded the facility at 301 Yucca St. for bringing compassion to those who have been written off by society.

The 4½ hour zoning drama on Sept. 17, 2009, left McNeil’s newly elected successor, Ivy Taylor, isolated from her council colleagues. (Only one other council member supported Taylor’s decision to vote against Crosspoint’s zoning request.) The meeting also marked the only time I ever saw then-Mayor Julián Castro — who voted in support of Crosspoint — shouted down by a crowd at council chamber.

Given the bitterness of that day, it’s remarkable how serene the atmosphere is these days at Crosspoint’s East Side location, which is not only the largest of the nonprofits’ four local facilities, but also its headquarters.

“We had a beautiful 125-year-old building that was our headquarters in Tobin Hill,” Downey said. “I moved them (Crosspoint staffers) all over here because I wanted to spend money here in District 2.”

Crosspoint uses three floors of the sprawling five-story building it purchased in 2009 from the Sisters of the Holy Spirit. Those who associate the facility exclusively with transitioning services for the formerly incarcerated might be surprised to know that 30 of the nearly 100 residents at the East Side location are veterans, who have the second floor all to themselves. Each veteran gets a 108-square-foot single room, with a bed, desk and lavatory.

“The veterans, we get them from all different sources,” Downey said. “Haven for Hope has been quite a feeder for us. They have a lot of guys who start in their program and then they’re looking for something a bit more private.”

Volunteer nuns run the library, which houses lectures and serves as a screening room

— complete with stadium seating and popcorn — for Crosspoint’s movie nights. (“Coach Carter” was a recent showing.)

On the verdant grounds behind the old convent, Crosspoint’s residents cultivate a garden, whose produce they deliver on a regular basis to local food pantries.

For most of its short history on the East Side, Crosspoint has been dogged by a lawsuit from a group calling itself the Unincorporated Non-Profit Association of Concerned East Side Citizens and Property Owners. They filed suit against the city on Jan. 10, 2010, unleashing a protracted legal battle that finally ended on April 21, when U.S. District Judge Robert Pitman dismissed all claims against the city.

Taylor, who was appointed mayor last July, hasn’t exactly become a Crosspoint convert, but she has adopted the attitude that the zoning case is a done deal and everyone should move on.

Downey promised wary community activists in 2009 that Crosspoint would be a good neighbor, and he takes special pride in noting some of the ways in which his facility has been an asset to the East Side, such as making Crosspoint’s meeting rooms available for the Methodist Ministers Alliance and other area groups.

One of those wary community activists in 2009 was Taj Matthews, grandson of the Rev. Claude Black Jr., the late, legendary civil-rights leader. Five-and-a-half years later, Matthews is a believer.

“They have come into this community, and I think they have been a neighbor and a partner,” said Matthews, who devotes much of his time to working with at-risk youths. “They’re doing something that needed to be done, and that is to provide a service to the unheard.” ggarcia@express-news.net Twitter: @gilgamesh470

