

Hiawatha Academies takes space for second school

by Burl Gilyard

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The relatively quiet corner of Pleasant Avenue South and 38th Street West in south Minneapolis seems an unlikely spot to land a 57,000-square-foot lease deal.

But the growing [Hiawatha Academies](#), a public charter school, has signed a lease for the former Catholic school, at 3800 Pleasant Ave. S., for its new middle school in the largely residential neighborhood.

The school, set to open Aug. 13, will be the second location for the Minneapolis-based Hiawatha Academies.

Paul Donovan, who has established an expertise in school, church and nonprofit properties, led the leasing team for the property and said that the building drew strong interest.

"A property that seemingly would be difficult to market had a fair amount of demand," said Donovan of Bloomington-based Cushman & Wakefield/NorthMarq. "We had three schools that were interested."

Donovan said that he's seeing a shortage of good sites for charter schools.

"There's such a lack of good sites. There's just not good options for charter schools," Donovan said. "It's a great building."

For Hiawatha Academies, the deal is part of its long-term growth plans.

"Our long-term strategic plan is to grow to five schools by 2020," said Sean Elder, chief operating officer for Hiawatha Academies. "The second school is one of the stepping pieces of that. We're building out a network of charter schools."

Elder said that 98 percent of the school's population are "students of color" and that 85 percent are Latino.

"The focus of our school is really closing the achievement gap," Elder said, referring to the disparities between white children and children of color. "We wanted to find a good community partner that was engaged with the work that we do."

Sagrado Corazón De Jesús, an independent Catholic nonprofit created to serve the local Latino community, owns the building.

"I think it complements our mission very nicely," said Brad Capouch, administrator for Sagrado Corazón. "Hiawatha has been rated one of the top schools in the state of Minnesota. We are really pleased with the fact that Hiawatha became our tenant."

The building was home to the San Miguel Middle School from 2003 until 2011, Capouch said.

"They had some financial difficulties ... they had to fold the school," Capouch said.

Sagrado Corazón then contacted Donovan to find a new tenant for the building. Donovan's team



Hiawatha Academies, a growing charter school, will open its new middle school Aug. 13 at 3800 Pleasant Ave. S. in Minneapolis. The building dates to the 1930s and includes a 1960s-era addition. (Staff photo: Bill Klotz)

included Josh O'Neill, Jaclyn May and Tim Venne. He noted that his team is currently marketing a couple of former Catholic schools in St. Paul.

"We've got a fair amount of interest from schools," Donovan said of the St. Paul properties.

Hiawatha Academies began in 2007 in a few classrooms in the basement of St. Joan of Arc Church in south Minneapolis. As the charter school grew, it expanded the former Morris Park Elementary School building, a former Minneapolis Public Schools property, in 2009.

Elder noted Minnesota state law bars charter schools from owning their own property. Hiawatha Academies leases its Hiawatha Leadership Academy for kindergarten through fourth-grade pupils at 3810 E. 56th St. in Minneapolis from the Hanover, Md.-based Charter School Development Corp. The school currently has about 390 students.

The new school at 3800 Pleasant Ave. S. will be called Adelante College Prep and will start with just fifth- and sixth-graders this year. Plans call for later expanding it to grades five through eight. Elder estimates that it will have 125 students in its first year.

The project team includes St. Louis Park-based RJM Construction as general contractor and Minneapolis-based U+B architecture and design.

Elder said that the renovation of the 1930s space called for adding an elevator, making restrooms compliant with the federal Americans with Disabilities Act, and converting some former library and office space on the second floor of the three-story building into additional classrooms.

"There were some renovations for us to have a welcoming office" for parents and families, Elder said.

A Minnesota Department of Education report in May ranked Hiawatha Academies as the top school in the state for its work to close to the achievement gap among students.

"The growth comes from the academic success. It comes from our impact on students," Elder said.

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