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Tree of Life Christian Schools Plan Move to Former AOL Building

The situation:

Tree of Life Christian Schools, sponsored and supported by seven north Columbus churches through their missions programs, was founded in 1978 to provide superior education and nurture young lives in Christ. Today, its four campuses house 675 students in programs ranging from early education through grade 12. Almost 150 teachers, faculty and staff are committed to the spiritual, intellectual and personal development of the student body. Tree of Life Christian School's rigorous academic program has been accredited by the Ohio Department of Education and the Association of Christian Schools International. It is not a charter school.

Tree of Life facilities have become inadequate to meet the current and future needs of the students and the school. Additionally, staff has long recognized that the school's mission would be enhanced by joining all four facilities on one campus. So, leadership embarked on an arduous and extensive search for new space. They have reviewed more than twenty sites and/or facilities in Franklin County, particularly desiring to remain within the I-270 loop to ensure ease of access and to maintain and enhance the diversity of the student body.

As a result of this search, Tree of Life identified and has entered into a contract with Time Warner for the purchase of the unoccupied AOL building located on Arlington Center Court just south of Henderson in the city of Upper Arlington. While the campus will require extensive investment to adapt it for school purposes, Tree of Life believes the facility will be an excellent fit for years to come and that it will contribute immeasurably to the already high quality of education and life in the Upper Arlington community.

The school expects to be open in the fall of 2011, pending city approval and renovation.

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The property is a good investment for Tree of Life because:

- The campus will comfortably accommodate all grade levels and administration facilities for Tree of Life Christian Schools, currently spread across four facilities. The size and configuration of the buildings are ideally suited for a school.
- Its location is ideal. Being inside the I-270 outer belt makes it easier for Tree of Life to fulfill its mission of educating children from throughout central Ohio in a Christian environment. The campus will be the only preschool through 12th grade Christian school in the Northwest and West sectors of Franklin County.
- The campus will allow Tree of Life to meet its vision of providing quality Christian education to a more students.

More about the property:

- The buildings have 253,000 square feet.
- The renovation is an excellent example of adaptive reuse, where a building is retrofitted for a use other than that for which it was built. Keeping buildings in use avoids reduction in real estate tax income from lower property valuations caused by unproductive properties. In addition, it furthers one of the school's goals of fostering good stewardship of the environment.
- The building across the street from the main building (the former Compuserve Fitness Facility) will also be a part of the campus and will house preschool and kindergarten. It is also currently vacant.
- This renovation, using environmentally friendly techniques and building systems, will result in a much greener environment.
- A 65,000-70,000 square-foot addition to the facility is planned to accommodate gymnasiums and a chapel to be used for religious and educational purposes. These additions will serve as a buffer on the north side of the property, closest to Henderson Road, thus eliminating any impact on residential areas. The green space along the south portion of the property will not be impacted by new construction. No new construction will be taller than the current three stories.
- Athletic fields, for team sports, will not be located on this campus.

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The purchase of the AOL Building by Tree of Life is good for the city of Upper Arlington because:

- Tree of Life Christian Schools will provide income tax income greater than what has been realized from this site in many years and obviously more than what is now being realized from unoccupied buildings.
- Tree of Life currently employs 148 people and, with the growth expected from unifying its campuses, expects its staff to grow to more than 200 people within a few years of opening. Annual payroll exceeds \$2.5 million. This represents a significant increase over the payroll at the buildings in recent years when AOL had 25-40 employees.
- The campus includes a Class III data center, which has potential commercial value. Tree of Life is interested in leasing it to a third party and has received inquiries from parties that have expressed an interest in leasing the facility. If such a transaction can happen, it would provide enhanced property tax income and income tax income for Upper Arlington.
- Tree of Life will provide a complement to the already excellent educational offerings in the Upper Arlington area, by offering affordable tuition and a strong Christian foundation for learning.

Fund Development:

- A fund development campaign has secured funding to purchase the building and prepare the school for opening its doors in the fall of 2011.

For More Information:

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