

Peggy's Primary Connection gets permanent home

By Caitlyn May
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Ana Maria Dudley told them she couldn't do it.

She couldn't stand in front of a crowd made up of teachers, school administrators and community supporters and talk about how thrilled she was to have a new, permanent home for the family resource center in Cottage Grove.

There was no way.

But on Thursday, Sept. 20, shielding her eyes from the sun, with tears on her voice, she took to the podium and thanked her friend Peggy.

"I remember 28 years ago when Peggy came to us with this idea," said Sherry-Duerst Higgins, the longest-serving member currently seated on the South Lane School Board. "We supported it and I remember when the first classes were held at the dis-

trict office."

Those classes — parenting classes, early childhood classes, teen parenting classes — were part of what became Peggy's Primary Connection, a gem in the South Lane School District that worked to establish early ties to community and provide a resource for parents and children.

And until this year, it was doing it without a home of its own.

Peggy's Primary Connection moved out of the district offices but managed to ping-pong around the district and, according to several speakers on Thursday, never knew where it would land next.

In 2016, voters approved a \$35 million bond for upgraded security and technology around the school district as well as the construction of a new elemen-



CAITLYN MAY/COTTAGE GROVE SENTINEL

Members of the community were on hand for the official ribbon cutting to Early Learning Center on Sept. 20. The program provides resources for parents and children in the South Lane School District.

tary school, a revamp of the community pool and a permanent home for the district's early learning center.

The new building provides offices for staff, an outdoor playground and more space for programs and services including parent education, early education, HeadStart, homework help, jobs programs, second-language advocacy, childcare and health

insurance and medical care.

"Peggy's Primary Connection is not just a place," said Jackie Lester, the P-20 outreach coordinator based at the new center. "It's a concept that we take out into the community. We meet them where they are."

It was a sentiment echoed throughout the day with several community partners attending the ribbon-cut-

ting ceremony and one word floating out from the chatter just prior to the grand opening: "Happy."

"We're so happy for you." "The kids will be so happy."

"I'm so happy this is happening."

And despite her tears and halting speech stopped now and then by emotion, Dudley was happy too. She talked

about Lintula, who passed away in 2016 and her dedication to early education.

She talked about how they worked together for more than a decade and how Lintula had seen the plans for the new center just prior to her passing.

"Today," Dudley said, "Peggy's dream is now a reality."

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