

Work begins on Central Avenue intersection

Preckwinkle says repairs are needed for children's safety at St. Gerald School

By Joe Boyle

The long-awaited intersection improvements at Central Avenue and Southwest Highway in Oak Lawn has now begun.

A groundbreaking ceremony took place on Oct. 2 in the parking lot of St. Gerald Elementary School, 9320 S. 55th Court, which is adjacent to the intersection.

Cook County Board President Toni Preckwinkle joined Cook County Commissioner John Daley at the ceremony. "This corner was a tragedy waiting to happen," said Preckwinkle.

More than 100 crashes have been reported at the heavily traveled intersection during the past decade. Cook County, at the urging of Daley, will cover the \$1.6 million in intersection improvements, Preckwinkle said.

With the intersection adjacent to St. Gerald School, it is used by hundreds of school children and their parents daily.

The intersection also includes an existing Pace bus route that serves students from Queen of Peace and St. Laurence high schools in nearby Burbank.

Also on hand for the ceremony were Oak Lawn Mayor Sandra Bury, Oak Lawn Trustees Tim Desmond (1st), Alex Olejniczak (2nd), Bob Streit (3rd) and Village Manager Larry Deetjen. Village Clerk Jane Quinlan was also in attendance.

State Sen. Bill Cunningham (D-18th) and state Rep. Kelly Burke (D-36th), whose districts take in portions of Oak Lawn, were also in attendance.

The Rev. Lawrence Malcom, pastor of St. Gerald Parish, gave a blessing. Al Theis, the St. Gerald principal, also spoke at the ceremony.

"We agree with Commissioner Daley and President Bury that keeping children safe and preventing more accidents are priorities for the county, and that without our involvement, this much-needed project would continue to be delayed," said Preckwinkle. "We are pleased that due to action of the County Board, work on these important improvements can now proceed."

The project became a reality after seven years of dis-



On hand for the groundbreaking at Central Avenue and Southwest Highway were (from left) Cook County Board Comm. John Daley, Oak Lawn Mayor Sandra Bury, Cook County Board President Toni Preckwinkle, Oak Lawn Trustee Alex Olejniczak (2nd), Oak Lawn Village Clerk Jane Quinlan and Oak Lawn Trustee Tim Desmond (1st). They were joined by students at St. Gerald School, which is located next to the corner. (News-Herald photo by Joe Boyle)

cussion. Daley credits Preckwinkle for personally getting involved to make this happen. Preckwinkle, a former teacher, added that the children's safety was a priority.

The project provides the addition of a left turn lane on Central Avenue and Southwest Highway by widening the existing pavement to the east.

Other aspects to the project include curb and gutter removal and replacement, and drainage improvements and adjustments. Traffic signal modifications are included in the project, along with sidewalk repairs and landscaping.

"Improvements at this intersection were long overdue," Daley said.

Daley also thanked Bury, Deetjen, Quinlan and the Oak Lawn trustees for their efforts. Olejniczak, whose district includes the Central Avenue intersection, had been persistent in trying to get the safety improvements made at the intersection.

"Don't give up on something that is important," said Olejniczak. "I put in a call to Commissioner Daley and he said, 'how can I help you.' It's been seven years in the making. It's a great day for Oak Lawn."

Throughout the length of the project staging, traffic will be reduced to one lane in each direction on both Central Avenue and Southwest Highway. Left turn lanes will be maintained.

Motorists can expect delays while the project is being worked on. Depending on the weather, the project is scheduled to be completed by the beginning of winter.



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