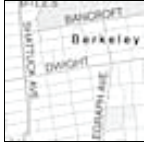


# Berkeley puts up balance of funds for disability center

Carolyn Jones, Chronicle Staff Writer

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Somewhere, Ed Roberts is smiling.

A one-of-a-kind regional campus named in honor of the pioneering disability rights activist won its final round of funding Tuesday night when the Berkeley City Council voted unanimously to pay the remaining \$2 million.

The Ed Roberts Campus will be a Bay Area center for disability services, policy research and education. Ground will be broken in May or June, after 12 years of fundraising.

"Everyone's a little stunned," said Dmitri Belser, president of the Ed Roberts Campus. "People are feeling pretty happy right now. But they're also feeling a lot of incredible gratitude."

The \$45 million campus, to be built on part of a parking lot at the Ashby BART station, will be a one-stop-shop for people with disabilities and their families. It will house about a dozen nonprofits, a cafe, fitness center, child care center, art gallery and other public amenities.

Advocates say there will be nothing else like it in the world. The design itself sets a new standard for accessibility, with a sweeping circular ramp visible through two-story glass walls, Braille maps, automatic doors, extra-large elevators operated by foot paddles and other creative flourishes.

Most of the funding came from BART, the federal government, private foundations, the City of Berkeley and the Metropolitan Transportation Commission, which Wednesday approved a \$4.5 million grant that was contingent on Berkeley's contribution.

"I'm on cloud nine," said Berkeley Mayor Tom Bates, who's been working for years to line up the campus funding. "Ed was a real hero of mine, and it's wonderful we're now able to build this living tribute to him."

Berkeley's contribution is comprised of \$500,000 from the capital projects fund and \$1.5 million that Caltrans had promised Berkeley to build a sound wall at Aquatic Park. Residents, officials and city staff worked for years on plans to build an earthen sound wall along Interstate 80, but the wall was not built because of skyrocketing costs.

City officials persuaded Caltrans to allow the money to be spent instead on the Ed Roberts campus. City Council members said Tuesday they still want to see the 8-foot-tall berm built.

"The berm's a good idea, but I'll take Ed Roberts any day," City Councilwoman Betty Olds said.

Ed Roberts, who died in 1995, founded the independent living movement in the United States in early 1970s. Left nearly immobile from polio as a teenager, Roberts was the first student with significant disabilities admitted to UC Berkeley; he lived at Cowell Hospital.

While at Cal, he started the disabled students' association, which later became the Center for Independent Living in Berkeley. Bates was an Alameda County supervisor when Roberts asked the board for money to start the center.

"Ed was a brilliant speaker," Bates said. "He used to say, 'We're not handicapped - we're not cap in hand. We're disabled.' He changed the way we think about disabled people. He literally changed the world."

There are now more than 200 Centers for Independent Living across the nation. Berkeley's founding center plans to be among the first groups to move to the Ed Roberts Campus when it opens.

One reason Roberts was so successful was the force of his personality and his ability to bring people together, his supporters say. He joined forces with other minority groups to bring disability rights into the larger umbrella of civil rights issues.

"His life was about collaborations," Belser said. "Actually, this whole project has been about collaborations. We couldn't have done it otherwise."

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