

'Three centers' to aid local residents

Qingdao's Shinan district offers range of amenities

By XIE CHUANJIAO

Shinan district, the core district of Qingdao in East China's Shandong province, is building a new platform to better serve communities and neighborhoods.

After experiencing series of grand events, like the Olympic Sailing Regatta in 2008 and National Sports Meet in 2010, the district is displaying a brand new look in both the appearance and its economy.

With growth in the economy and promotion of living standards for residents who have higher expectations on the development of the district, a key task for the local government is offering the people a higher service platform.

So, at the end of 2008, it made an ambitious plan to become a district with "five highest" — the most optimized economy structure, the most beautiful city environment, the highest ethical standards of residents, the most stable public order and the greatest development potential.

However, the weak infrastructure at the grassroots level made the district distant the goals.

At that time, the staff in the community just worked in simple and shabby houses with scant facilities.

Li Xuehai, the secretary of Administration of Shinan district had a deep feeling on this. When he inspected the work at the beginning of his new term, he was struck to see some old communists working in a tin-roofed room surrounded by tall buildings with modern facilities. How can they serve people well enough without even a stable working place?

In 2009, plans to build "Three Centers" — management center, medical center, culture center — with more than 1,000 square meters for every community were envisioned by Shinan district.

"To build new community centers meeting international standards adapted to local realities will be a key task for Shinan to grow into a first-class district," said Li.

According to Li, constructing the centers with more than 1,000 square meters not only meets the current needs, but also sets aside sufficient space for the long-term development of public services to avoid second building generated from the insufficient supply of infrastructure because of the rapid development of society.

The "three centers" have clear and separate functions.

"Management centers" provide face-to-face public services on taxation, insurance, unemployment and social security for the poor, disabled and the elderly.

"Medical centers" provide convenient health guidance and care services, while culture centers, not only give residents a traditional recreational place, but to promote the residents' qualities in thought, skill and health.

The "culture centers" organize dancing, singing and other activities in addition to learning opportunities through computers, libraries, calligraphy, flower cutting, and arts and crafts.

However, they met great difficulties during the process, among which finding housing was said to be the hardest one because of the sky-high estate prices in the booming area.

"Almost all the staff from the community is asked to search house sources at that time, after which some residents are also launched to do that job too," said Xin Minzhi, Party secretary of the Labor Union of Zhanshan Community, whose community finished the "three centers" construction earliest.

She even used the phrase "looking for a needle in a haystack" to describe the hard job of searching for houses.

"For example, the house resources of the Yancheng Road Community, were provided by an enthusiastic resident. Having known that the house is on sale, we managed to contact with the owner after twists and turns. And after bargaining over and over again for more than 10 times, we finally make it the 'three centers'.

A difficult road

"Three centers" of Macao Road Community met even worse situation. According to Hui Wenxue, head of the community work station, the now "three centers" used to belong to three owners: two companies and a clinic.

The companies accepted the price without hesitation, but the clinic owner didn't compromise in the beginning.

They could do nothing but persuade the clinic owner with patience and at last the owner was moved by their sincerity. Things did not get better when the centers started to build, because residents in the neighborhood interrupted the project again and again because they did not understand what the government was doing beside making noise.

The staff of the centers had to explain to them and residents clearly knew at last and smiled. Now they come to the center one after another to take the activities and classes.

Besides the difficulty in finding houses, there were still



Staff members of the Shinan district government answer need of local residents.

PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

other difficulties in the process of constructing the "three centers", that is, difficulty in unifying thoughts as well as in fund.

In order to ensure funds to construct three centers, the government of Shinan district did everything possible to raise money. They tilted the financial capital and reduced spending on other works, and even asked for bank loans. In 2010, more than 500 million yuan was put into the construction of the centers.

It is more difficult to unify thoughts and make decision before finding a house.

Many people asked such questions as "why should we spend so much money and time to buy a new house? Why not rent one? Is it necessary for every community to have a three centers area with no less than 1,000 sq? They think our actions unimaginable and unreasonable."

"In fact, it is a test on how deep we love our people, and how the government practices



An English class brings fun to local children in the Hong Kong Park community in Shinan district, Qingdao.

the scientific outlook on development to improve people's well-being in today." Talking about the difficulties they met, Xin said so to China Daily.

After hard work for three years, now 42 centers over 1,000 square meters each have

been built, among which 30 ones are in service and another 12 are speeding up building.

"By the end of this year, 80 percent of the communities will have their new centers, and by the year 2012, all the centers in Shinan District will be com-

pleted," Li Xuehai said.

"We regard the 'three centers' in community as a livelihood project, which should be done today and benefit the later generations, so we are determined to carry it forward," Li said.

New activities, renewed lives

By DAI YAN

Seventy-year-old retired teacher Zhan Yuanfen is attentively warming up for a dance class at the Hong Kong Garden Community Center in Shinan district.

Stretching her legs, extending her arms, flexing her waist — she does every movement as intently as a primary school student.

"We are so thankful for what the district government has done for us," Zhan told China Daily, recalling the old days when there was no place for locals to have community activities.

"We had boring lives because our children have their own work or schools, leaving the aged lonely at home," she said. "We had no idea where to go to pass the time. I often felt useless and depressed."

Her dance classmate, 60-year-old Li Lifen, felt the same.

"I was with my grandchild for years, but now she is old enough for school. I felt jobless for a second time, similar to when I retired several years ago."

They were excited in 2009 to hear the district government had started building a spacious, modern community center for the neighborhood.

After two years, the 1,400-square-meter center is complete with function rooms where residents both learn skills and have fun.

"I'm here every day, even on weekends. All the dance classes, singing classes — even computers and English — are open for free," she said, show-

ing off a swan-like pose.

"Aren't we looking like young people again?"

Gong Xue, a staff member at the center, witnessed the enthusiasm of the residents for the past two years as the community facility was built.

She said the senior citizens are very active in all the activities organized by the center. "They come and go on time every day as if they are doing a job they love here."

According to Gong, the center has rooms for playing chess and cards, dance classes, a university for the aged, courses on healthcare, finance and flower cutting, and a popular bilingual reading room for children.

More than 5,000 English titles including children's books are neatly arranged in the reading room.

A volunteer mom named Zuo Zhenci at work shelving the books said "we have more than 5,000 English books of different kinds, among them more than 2,000 original English picture books."

For Chinese children, especially those from poor families, it was before hard find these kinds of books," Zuo said.

Since the reading room opened, more than 30 children have been here to read and hear English classes that are free to poor families.

"I am moved by the building of the center, so I decided to do as much as I can to help in the development of the community and residents," Zuo said.

Song Liqing, chief of Shinan district publicity, said entertainment offered at the



Service center of the Yancheng Road community in Shinan district, Qingdao.

center makes a tremendous contributions to the building of a harmonious society.

"It provides people a place to communicate as well as to do things they are interested in, which will make the society more harmonious," Song said.

With administrative power entrusted to the community level, conflicts that might have led to serious incidents have been successfully diffused at the grassroots level.

Each community center has its own characteristics. There is a psychological consultation room at Kangjiazhuang Community Center, while Yangkou Road Center provides special facilities for disabled people.

At the Yunxiao Road Center, 63-year-old Ma Linhua was reading in the library. He seemed to be absorbed in the books.

"I come after breakfast," said Ma, who lives only 100 meters away. Before the new center was completed he wandered on the streets or shut himself home watching TV. At the center he finally found a superb place to spend his time reading.

The new community centers also attract foreigners as both volunteers and participants.

David Landler, an American with a trading company



The medical center offers healthcare service to senior citizens.



Senior citizens study in a computer course, a key program of the 'Three Centers'.

in Qingdao, often comes to the center to learn Chinese from

his neighbors in Zhanshan community center.

Providing diverse and personalized services

By DAI YAN AND HU QING

"We will transform the pool into a fishing pond where the elderly can have leisure time when it gets warm," Wang Guoji, head of the Tai'an Road Neighborhood Committee in Shinan district, said of a disused local pond.

Sitting in the office of a new 1,400-square-meter community center, he recalls that a couple of years ago he worked in a group of makeshift shelter houses, each less than 30 square meters.

Besides being small, the shabby houses had scant facilities.

At that time, it was even hard for them to have a meeting, especially in winter when people wore thick clothes, which made the room even more crowded.

Sometimes they had to stay in the open air for discussions.

When it rained, people had to rush into the shabby house to seek shelter and cover the computer.

Many community offices were in houses with temporary leases. Some locations changed so often that residents couldn't always find them.

"There was not enough room for two or three residents to stand at that time. How could we organize activities since we had no working places?" Dong Zuolan, head of Hong Kang Garden Community asked, very sorry that they couldn't serve the people well enough because of the poor condition even when they wanted.

Since the district started

to build new three centers from 2009, conditions changed.

The new centers with more than 1,000 square meters and facilities made a totally different sight in neighborhoods.

The new two-story Macao Road Center covers 1,270 square meters and houses 30 function rooms.

The Tai'an Road Center has 1,400 square meters and a multimedia classroom.

"We are consciously leading residents to receive training in the centers and more and more residents are willing to do so," said Xin Minzhi, Party secretary of the Labor Union for the Zhanshan community.

After the centers were completed, activities of the culture center are all organized by the neighborhood committee in Yancheng Road Community.

The committee set a reading room, electronic reading room, culture-training room and other different training rooms to meet the needs of the residents.

Xu Qun, bureau chief for Shinan civil affairs said training classes offered in the centers meet the needs for diverse and personalized learning of the residents which will promote the qualities of the whole neighborhood.

"Now we have spaces and time to organize colorful activities that make residents happy lives. It is us who should be thankful for the construction of 'Three Centers' that make it possible to serve people as well as we can," said Xin.