

The Seattle Times

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Business / Technology

Originally published Wednesday, June 4, 2014 at 6:06 PM

FareStart expands to Pacific Tower's health-care campus

Seattle nonprofit FareStart, which trains homeless and disadvantaged men and women for the food-service industry through its downtown Seattle restaurant, is expanding across town with a new location in Beacon Hill's landmark Pacific Tower.

By Coral Garnick

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Seattle nonprofit FareStart, which trains homeless and disadvantaged men and women for the food-service industry through its downtown Seattle restaurant, is expanding across town with a new location in Beacon Hill's landmark Pacific Tower.

In the 21 years since the organization was founded, it has helped nearly 7,000 people get jobs and served more than 6 million meals to men, women and children around Puget Sound.

FareStart will be joining the Seattle Central College health-training program, which is

expected to occupy up to six stories of Pacific Tower by 2015. The building also houses the Pacific Medical Center, which now takes up the basement and the first floor.

FareStart CEO Megan Karch called the move "a dream scenario" that should help the nonprofit sharply increase both its revenues and the number of people it trains.

"We're thrilled to become a part of Pacific Tower's new Innovation Center," she said in a statement. "We'll be able to significantly expand our training — a key focus of our strategic growth plan — in a location that will also bring together other organizations providing key support services to the community."

FareStart will use the new space for training and classrooms and will also run an espresso bar and quick-service cafeteria for the building. The organization will also be the exclusive caterer for the event space on the eighth floor.

Since Amazon.com vacated Pacific Tower, often called the PacMed Center, in 2011, it has been hurting for a tenant big enough to fill 13 floors totaling 205,000 square feet.

The Washington State Department of Commerce signed a 30-year lease for the tower starting in January, and is subleasing the space to the college, FareStart and other tenants.

FareStart will move in September, and the state Commerce Department is in negotiations with seven other organizations to take space in the tower, including the American Parkinson's Disease Association, Cross Cultural Health Care, and 501 Commons, said Tim Hamann, the department's project manager for the building.

With its new space, which includes 10,000 square feet on the first and second floors, FareStart will be able to focus on its five-year strategic plan that includes growing its training programs from 320 people annually to 520, and increasing the number of graduates from 167 in 2013 to 320 by 2018.

FareStart simultaneously aims to grow from \$3.7 million in annual sales to \$7 million. Half of the organization's operating revenue comes from the FareStart Restaurant at its 700 Virginia Street building, which it will continue to operate in tandem with the Pacific Tower location.

"Not only will the Pacific Tower space allow us to more than double the number of students we're serving, but it will also allow that growth to happen sustainably," Karch said in the statement. "It's a win-win."

Construction started Monday on the second floor of Pacific Tower, which will house FareStart's kitchen, Hamann said.

"It is the first real nonprofit coming in," he said. "It's exciting to see more of a heartbeat finally coming into the building."

Information from Seattle Times archives was used in this report.

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