

Abused kids' center to grow

Lake-Sumter Children's Advocacy Center building new facility in Leesburg

By **MICHELLE L. START**

Daily Commercial Staff Writer

LEESBURG

The Lake-Sumter Children's Advocacy Center is working on a place to call its own.

The agency, which works with sexually and physically abused children, is building a 3,400-square-foot facility on Canal Street in Leesburg. Officials work with 300 to 325 children from infants to 18-year-olds.

Officials now rent a renovated house in Tavares. They also have a facility in Bushnell.

"We just started construction," said Diane Piszczek, executive director. "The foundation is being poured. We expect to be under roof within the next 30 to 45 days."

She said officials hope to move in to the new facility within the next six months.

"It has been a dream to the agency and the board of directors to construct a facility from the ground up that is dedicated to children and children's needs," Piszczek said.

She said the Tavares facility was not designed for its current use, which has made some things, such as videotaping sessions, tricky.

"What we have here is wonderful, but it was originally a residence," Piszczek said. "We need specialized rooms."

The facility is expected to cost about \$400,000 to construct. Grants and community donations will offset the costs, according to Piszczek.

"The community has been extremely supportive," she said. "We are about \$100,000 short of our goal, but we are hopeful of having it by the time it opens up."

A representative from the University of Florida's child protection team will work out of the new facility, conducting medical exams.

Piszczek said officials also are hoping officials from law enforcement, the state attorney's office and the Department of Children and Families will also have offices in the new building.