

# New ESL charter school provides second chance

## Dropouts to receive vocational training

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EAST ST. LOUIS — High school dropout Robert Young, 22, went back to school Monday.

He's enrolled in the newly opened Tomorrow's Builders Charter School, which had its first day of classes Monday.

Young, of East St. Louis, said he dropped out of high school after getting shot in the head over retaliation against a friend. He now has a five-year plan, and one of his goals is to graduate from high school, then go to college.

"To me, in East St. Louis, there are three options. Either you go to school out here, you get a job, or you go out on the streets. I want to be a businessman someday, that's why I'm here," Young said.

The vocational school for at-risk students was established through an agreement between the Emerson Park Development Corp. and The Governor French Academy of Belleville. Charter schools are taxpayer-funded but are not bound by the same regulations as public schools.

Vickie Forby, executive director of the Emerson Park Development Corp., said she believes the students enrolled

in the school will make it through to graduation.

"They have street smarts and a load of common sense. If we can combine those with a work ethic, a conscious decision to do what's right and a real commitment to make those positive choices, those kids are unstoppable," Forby said.

The school received approval from the State Board of Education to open its doors Friday afternoon. The board had voted unanimously in May to accept the proposal to open it, Forby said.

The school enrolls students who are seeking a second chance to graduate from high school. So far, there are 46 students enrolled, and the maximum allowed to attend is 60. Forby said the school hopes to increase enrollment to up to 200 in coming years.

"There's a mix of different personalities," said Paul Seibert, a consultant to Tomorrow's Builders school and director of Charter Consultants, a division of The Governor French Academy in Belleville.

"Almost everybody had dropped out of conventional school, and because someone in their lives told them they could come back, they are here," Seibert said.

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### OBITUARIES

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