

CITY

Agencies Say Relocation of Survivors' Aid Center Comes as a Surprise

By BARBARA STEWART

Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg announced yesterday afternoon that the comprehensive social services center set up on Pier 94 for people left jobless, homeless, bereaved or injured by the attack on the World Trade Center would shut down today, and that a similar center would open in a city-owned downtown building on Monday.

He said that many of the leaders of organizations that have been offering economic, legal and emotional help at the Pier 94 center were "ecstatic" about the move.

But representatives of the various agencies said yesterday that they had not been told about the closing or the move. They said they would have appreciated more notice.

The new center will be situated at 51 Chambers Street, a 13,000-square-foot space that used to be an Emigrant Savings Bank branch. Like the Pier 94 center, it will be a social services version of one-stop shopping, said Jonathan D. Greenspun, commissioner of the Community Assistance Unit. Most of the 15 or so agencies at Pier 94 — which included the Red Cross, the Federal Emergency Management Agency, Safe Horizons, the Salvation Army and a chaplains' center — will have stations there, he said.

Mr. Greenspun said that agency representatives were told at a meeting Wednesday evening about the closing. But officials of the Red Cross, Safe Horizons and the Salvation Army said that references to the closing were vague. The Red Cross learned of the moving date only yesterday afternoon, said Nancy Rutherford, an agency spokeswoman.



G. Paul Burnett/The New York Times

Photos of the missing from the Sept. 11 attack adorn the exterior of Pier 94 on the Hudson. The assistance center inside is to shut down today and reopen in a city-owned downtown building on Monday.

And Becky Michaels of Safe Horizons said: "There's been an ever-liquid end date. But it hadn't ever been concrete."

Mr. Greenspun said that the relocation of the center was necessary to accommodate a trade show scheduled to open at Pier 94 in 10 days.

Employees who arrived at Pier 94 yesterday expecting a typical day

encountered workers packing equipment that the agencies had been using. The Rev. Bill Minson found that the curtains surrounding the chaplains' station had been removed. "We had to ask them to please put them up again and leave them until the end of the day," he said.

Employees said they had long known that Pier 94 was a temporary

site and had heard rumors of various moving dates, but that the timing had come as a surprise.

"I'm in shock," said a volunteer at the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. "Where are we going to go now? We've been here all these months, through all these emotional times and now — poof! I think we deserved some cere-

mony in closing this."

Agency officials and employees also said they were worried that certain advantages of the Pier 94 center might be lost in the move. In particular, they were concerned that there might not be space for some agencies at the new location. The proximity of the various agencies was one of the best features of the Pier 94 center, said Maj. George Polarek, a Salvation Army commander. "We got to know each other," he said. "We could walk clients to another agency and stay with them through the entire process."

Also important to many agency workers was the preservation of the remembrance wall at Pier 94, covered with hundreds of letters, drawings and posters of the missing. Mr. Greenspun said that the photos, posters and letters would be taken off the wall and eventually exhibited at the Museum of the City of New York.

He also said that most agencies would be given space at the Chambers Street building but that some of the specialized services, like hot meals and DNA sampling to help identify victims, might not be available. Signs will be posted at the Pier 94 site about the new downtown center and information will be posted on World Trade Center Web sites, Mr. Greenspun said.

Mr. Minson, the chaplain, said that in the long run, the move would probably be a good thing. But it would have been better, he said, to give employees, volunteers and family members more time to say goodbye to a center that has been the focus of so much grief.

"We experienced a lot of emotions here," he said. "We've given a lot of comfort and felt a lot of stress."

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