

Therapeutic reflecting garden for Baltimore homeless

When the homeless dine at the new Our Daily Bread facility when it opens in June, they will have a grand view of a superbly landscaped garden intended for reflection.

However, a vision is all they will have of the oasis, unless they are accepted into a program designed to advance their employability.

The reflecting garden – adjacent to the dining room of Catholic Charities’ new \$15 million employment center and soup kitchen – was included in the plans of the 52,000-square-foot building specifically for the men of Christopher Place to relax, play basketball and enjoy nature’s splendor.

It was also strategically placed to act as a dangling carrot for the estimated 700 homeless and needy Baltimoreans who will eat daily at the Fallsway building.

“We’re hoping the view of the reflecting garden will encourage the people using our dining facilities to seek a better life,” said Dennis M. Murphy, director of Our Daily Bread Employment Center. “By seeing the men of Christopher Place using this space, maybe they will discover there are other possibilities.”

Christopher Place Employment Academy is an 18-month-long Catholic Charities program for formerly homeless men, with live-in facilities and intense employment training to ready them for the workforce, aggressively treat substance abuse and prepare them to become productive members of society.

Upon moving into the new Our Daily Bread facility around Memorial Day weekend, the 10-year-old Christopher Place Employment Academy will grow from 42 to 60 beds.

This will provide increased opportunities for homeless men to get off of the street, into a therapeutic living environment with job training and financial management education, said Harold A. Smith, executive director of Catholic Charities.

The reflecting garden is one of many perks at the new building afforded the men enrolled in the Christopher Place program.

They will also have use of a library, laundry facilities, computers with internet capabilities and a recreation room complete with a pool table and exercise equipment, Mr. Murphy said.

However, the men of Christopher Place are also responsible for the maintenance and cleaning of the entire building, as well as upkeep of the reflecting garden, he said.

“This is all part of their recovery,” Mr. Murphy said. “They will be able to use this garden as a place to relax, reflect and enjoy the fresh air. They will also make sure the trees, shrubs and flowers thrive and that means they will have make sure the grounds are free of weeds too.”

The new three-story Our Daily Bread Employment Center – due to be fully occupied June 4 – will house three Catholic Charities’ programs, including Christopher Place, the Our Daily Bread meals program and the Maryland Re-entry Partnership – a program that enables formerly incarcerated men to successfully reintegrate into the community.