

EL PASO DISTRICT ACCEPTS BLUE FLAME

By Cindy Ramirez
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The El Paso Independent School District is taking over the Blue Flame building Downtown and will use it to house its administrative offices.

District trustees Tuesday voted unanimously to accept the building, which was donated by El Paso Energy. District officials said the building has a fair market value of \$6 million.

Initially, about 300 district employees are expected to move, possibly by May, into the 17-story tower.

"It's going to give us tremendous flexibility with what we hope to get done in the district," superintendent Stan Paz said after the trustees voted.

The building at Texas and Stanton was vacated after El Paso Energy moved its headquarters to Houston this year.

The acquisition was criticized by some who said the district should be spending money on schools and students. Proponents, however, said the district will need the extra space.

"I'm very disappointed" said Frances Wever, president of the El Paso Federation of Teachers. She said she didn't like the fact that money to renovate the building will be used for the administration instead of teachers and school supplies.

Officials estimate it will cost \$455,000 to renovate the building, move and comply with the American Disabilities Act. Parking

could cost an additional \$300,000 to \$1.2 million.

Paz said the building would free the district from its estimated \$200,000 in annual lease payments for warehouses and other buildings. According to a fact sheet passed out at Tuesday's board meeting, the donation includes about \$420,000 worth of furniture.



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El Paso Energy spokeswoman Karen King said the company could not comment on why it is donating the building until the negotiations are final.

Paz speculated the building was being donated for tax write-off purposes.

"They can't tell us it's not going to cost us more and expect us to believe it . . . they're just going to build more layers of bureaucracy," taxpayer Terry Diaz said.

Delia Camacha, president of the El Paso Teachers Association, said she hopes the building will be put to good use.

