

# Excellence or excess?

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power plant, the \$6 million project was paid for in cash.

Neil Pavlus, the school district's activities director, called the facility a good investment for the community, especially children.

He credited such efforts with keeping street gangs and drug problems to a minimum in Byron.

"We think it's important to keep kids off the streets," Pavlus said.

The 1,500 students in the school district will use the center for physical education and extra-curricular activities.

After school hours, the Byron Park District will open the center to the public. Entry fees will be \$3 for adults and \$2 for kids, with \$1 extra for out-of-towners.

Construction began 15 months ago under the management of The Durrant Group Inc. of Dubuque, Iowa.

The center, built as an addition to Byron High School, includes a corridor to Mary Morgan Elementary so those students can access the facilities without going outdoors.

Some classes already are using the center.

Physical education teacher Larry Spaulding called it an ideal classroom for a P.E. curriculum that includes everything from square dancing to soccer.

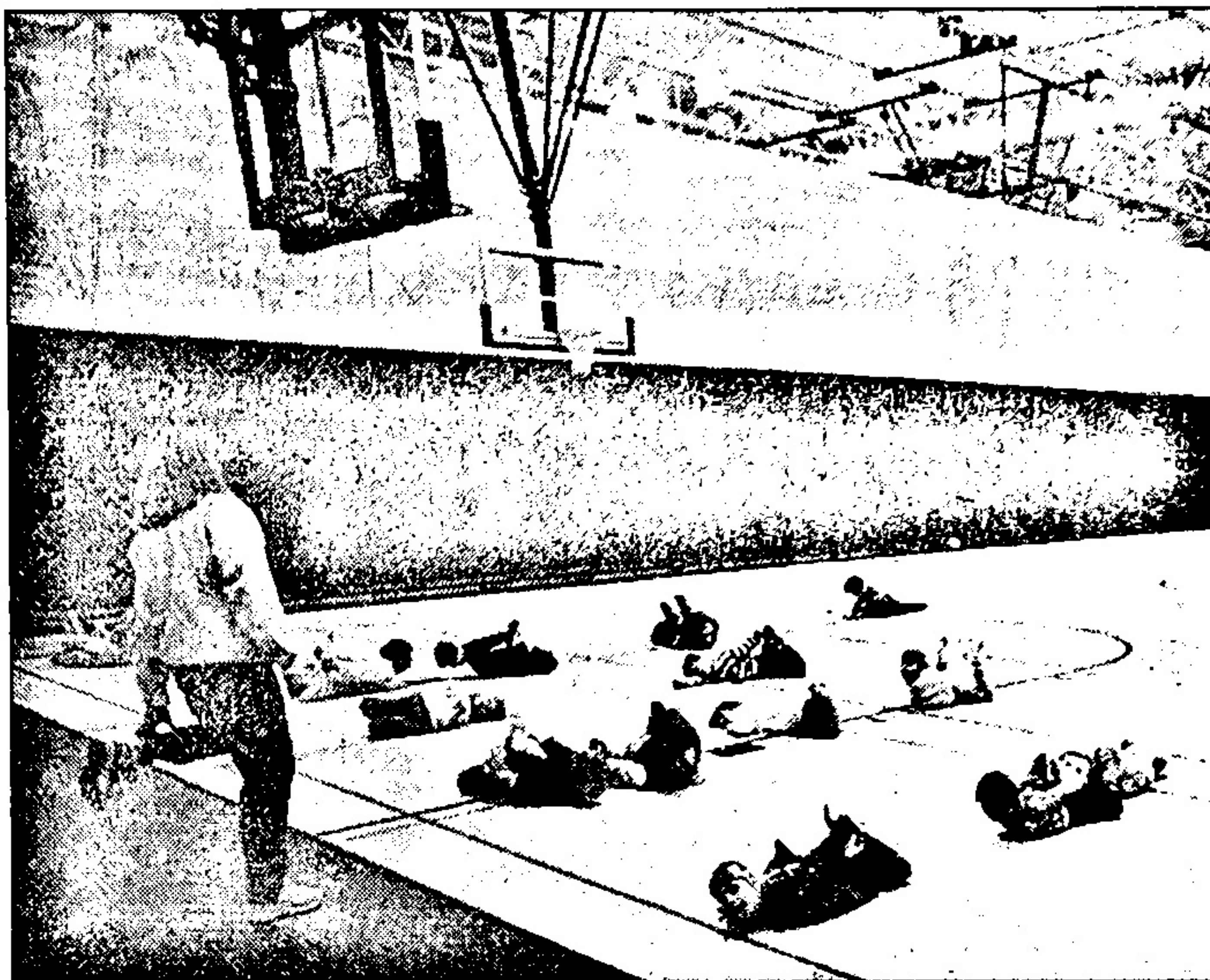
"It's just exactly what we need," he said. "We couldn't have asked for anything more."

The 78,000-square-foot center includes four basketball courts, an eight-lane running track, a 30-foot ceiling with enough room for pole-vaulting, an aerobics room with a mirrored wall, a weight room with \$40,000 worth of equipment, and private locker rooms for teachers.

It is a product of ComEd's \$40 million-a-year property tax bill — half of all property taxes paid in Ogle County.

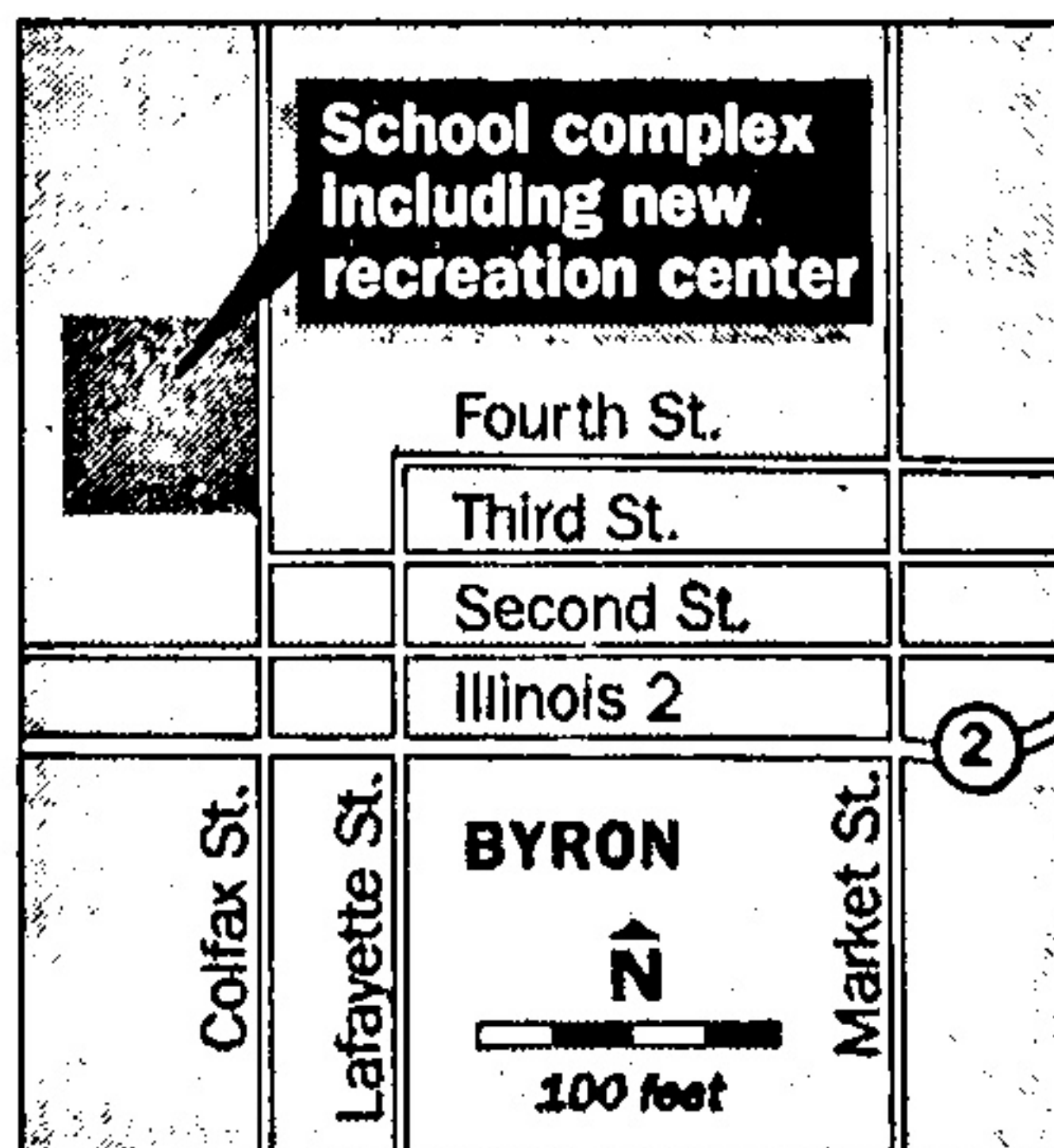
The power plant accounts for more than 90 percent of the school district's annual budget.

But the Illinois Property Tax Appeal Board ruled Jan. 9 that the plant was overvalued by up to



BRAD BURT/The Register Star

Wendy Jackson, a substitute first-grade teacher at Mary Morgan Elementary School, leads her class through warm-up exercises at the new recreation center in Byron.



MELISSA REEVE/The Register Star

60 percent between 1989 and 1992. The school district and other government agencies could be ordered to refund millions of dollars to the utility.

Local officials are appealing the ruling.

Critics say the ruling shows the school district was reckless to build so aggressively, knowing that its tax base was being challenged.

Carlson, elected to the school board last year on a spending-reform platform, said the town is sharply divided over the recre-

## What's next

The public is invited to tour the Byron School District's new \$6 million recreation center from 1 to 9 p.m. Sunday. The center is adjacent to Byron High School, 696 N. Colfax St.

ation center.

The timing of this weekend's grand opening, he said, "couldn't be worse."

Park District Executive Director Charley Riney, however, said the recreation center is comparable to facilities built by school districts in the Chicago area.

Riney envisions someday offering membership packages and turning the center into a sort of health-club operation.

He predicted that critics of the facility would be among the first to use it. "Once they see it, they'll be big users," he said. "So maybe it isn't such a bad deal after all."