

Developing children for 35 years

By **Karen Blackledge**
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— DANVILLE — The Danville Child Development Center prepares children socially and educationally, according to parent Erin Winn.

Winn's son Hayden has been going to the center since he was four months old. He's now 4 and in a preschool class.

"He has had wonderful experiences. The teachers really are the most caring, energetic and innovative and think of wonderful, fun learning experiences for these children every single day. Whether it's ABCs, numbers or writing, Hayden has learned it at school," she said of the center, which is observing its 35th anniversary this week.

"One of the great things about DCDC, based on development, a child is able to go onto the next classroom with a new set of teachers and a whole new learning environment," Winn said.

The center also teaches healthy lifestyles through exercise and healthy food choices.

"It is a very holistic view of development of a child captured in all different areas," said Winn, who also serves on the center's board of directors, representing Geisinger Health System.

The center, serving just under 600 children, is the only nationally accredited child care program in Montour and Northumberland counties, according to Executive Director Diana Dixon.

The mission of the center is "to provide high quality early education and child care in a safe nurturing and engaging environment."

The center was founded in February 1974 by Nancy Vella and Kathleen Mulligan.

"Their goal was to make sure all kids were being served and they made sure to include special needs children," said Joanna Blass, director of child care information services, who has worked at the center for 30 years.

The center began serving ages 3 to 6 and later added infant through school-age children. It started out in Shiloh United Church of Christ and within six months outgrew that location and moved to its current site at 398 Wall St.

The center began renting the building and later purchased it. An addition was built in 1995, bringing the square footage to 16,000.

Since the 1980s, the center has operated the Danville Elementary School Age Care for Kids program as a satellite operation year-round.

Open from 6:30 a.m. to 6 p.m. weekdays, the center serves Montour, Columbia, Northumberland counties and sometimes Union, Snyder and Luzerne counties. It has a few openings for toddlers and preschoolers.

Recently, the center was re-accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children under a new and stricter evaluation compared with a 2000 evaluation.

Board Vice President Erin Fitzgerald of Bloomsburg Hospital said, "Receiving this highest level of achievement from the gold standard of quality systems is an amazing testament to the commitment of staff and families at DCDC."

According to the Washington, D.C.-based NAEYC, a nationally accredited program must promote positive relationships for all children and adults, implement a curriculum fosters all areas of child development, use effective teaching approaches, provide ongoing assessments of a child's learning, promote nutrition and health of children, support teachers, maintain collaborative relationships with each child's family, establish relationships with and use resources of the community to achieve goals, provide a safe and healthy physical environment and provide high-quality experiences.

The nonprofit center, which receives the majority of its funds from fees paid by families for child care, also received the highest rating or Four Star by the Keystone STARS Program which evaluates staff education, learning environment, leadership and management and family and community partnerships. The center has been part of the program since a pilot program started in 2001.

The center also administers grants for Child Care Information Services of Montour County, Early Intervention Services in Columbia and Montour Counties and Montour County Advocates for Children — Community Engagement for Early Care and Education.

The center earned an Inclusion Support Project Award for creating inclusive environments for children with special needs in 2000.

Teacher Amy Cooper was named Early Childhood Educator of the Year last year by the Pennsylvania Child Care Association. Beth Nevius and Terri Lynn Lokoff received Child Care Teacher Awards in 2004. Becky Breech was a TEACH scholarship recipient in 2004. Deb Servose was Teacher of the Year in 2001. Servose and Lokoff received Child Care Teacher Awards in of the Central Susquehanna Association for the Education of Young Children in 2001. Earl Martz was a TEACH scholarship recipient from 2001-05.

Dixon has been center executive director for 10 years and serves as president of the Pennsylvania Child Care Association's Board of Directors and was co-chairman of its education and policy committee. She has served on the governing board for the Pennsylvania Associate for the Education of Young Children as public policy vice president. In 2003, she received the Pennsylvania Child Care Association's Award of Excellence. She received the Early Educator of the Year Award in 2005 from the Central Susquehanna Association for the Education of Young Children.

Other staff members include Michele Jenkins who serves as education manager; Steve Bevans, business manager; Lori Rabb McDonnell, enrollment coordinator; and Jennifer Hipps, early intervention coordinator. The center employs about 40 part- and full-time people.

Roger Hayman of Tree Medic is the center's board president. Erin Fitzgerald of Bloomsburg Hospital is vice president; Jeff Kay of the Central Susquehanna Intermediate Unit is secretary-treasurer; and E. Lynn Miller of Geisinger Health System is past president. Other board members are Renee Beisswanger of Danville Area Head Start, Christine Gordon of Geisinger health Plan, Nicole Del Gotto Harvey of Bloomsburg Area School District, retired Bloomsburg University professors Bill Jones, Cindy Line of March of Dimes and Michael Mertz of Keystone Insurance Association.

E-mail comments to kblackledge@thedanvilnews.com.

Special 35th Anniversary Events

Feb. 2

9:30 a.m.: Open house with Harriet Dichter, deputy secretary of the Office of Child Development and Early Learning. She will speak at 10 a.m. Tours will follow.

Feb. 3

70s Day with staff and children dressing to commemorate the first decade of the center.

Feb. 4

3-6 p.m.: Cake and coin purse souvenir in dining room for parents and children

Feb. 5

Compliment children's teacher day with parents encouraged to tell the staff how much they mean to them

Feb. 6

Fun Day: Beth Lynn of the Thomas Beaver Library will read during preschool story time. Other special guest readers

Upcoming

Celebrity waiter event 6 p.m. May 16 in Danville's ballroom. Tom Morgan will be master of mayhem. Joining the cast as waiters will be Peggy Chamberlain and Montour

County Commissioners Jack Gerst and Jerry Ward.
Many award-winning waiters will be returning. In the past
two years, the event raised \$10,000 for the center's endowment.
Proceeds this year go toward the scholarship
fund to help parents pay for child care.

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Photos



Danville Child Development Center students and teachers Ethan Berkheimer, left, Karen Benfield, Lauren Baker, Kiersten Farnsworth, Emma Hayman, Cayetano Smith, Megan Stout, and Corinne Wagner, read books in their Huggy Bear Classroom on Wednesday. DCDC is celebrating their 35th anniversary this year.