

Wolfeboro Area Children's Center has served the community for 40 years

BY ELISSA PAQUETTE
Staff Writer

WOLFEBORO — After school, children walk over to the Wolfeboro Area Children's Center (WACC), the big, white traditional style building located across from Brewster Academy on 180 South Main Street, accompanied by staff members. As they troupe in, the hallways fill with laughter and chatter, as they go to their classrooms to greet their teachers and sit down for a snack.

I visit the kindergartners, who each have a homemade pumpkin muffin and a cup of milk in front of them as they gather around a table. As I snap photographs, the muffins quickly disappear, they drink their milk, and soon empty muffin cups and empty plastic cups are the only evidence remaining that a snack was served.

Down the hall, older children sit together on the floor and begin to talk about their day and how they were managed to get dinner the night before when the power went out for several hours.

I'm visiting the center today for it has reached a milestone. The NH Licensed Plus facility is in its 40th year of service to the community.

Executive Director Susan Whiting has been a part of the center, founded by Edie DesMara's to meet the needs of working families, for 38 years. She's ready to give a tour of the recent renovations — new flooring and rugs, freshly-painted walls, reorganized spaces, large and small. She's thrilled with the results of all the planning and is happy that parents appreciate it, as well.

The community has always been supportive, she says. It's their largesse — \$25,000 from donors and \$75,000 allocated from the trustees' Endowment Fund, that made the improvements possible. The board organizes fundraisers throughout the year, too. Winter brings the Team Trivia Tournament to the Wolfeboro Inn on Wednesday evenings, beginning Jan. 7. Residents come in from the cold and enjoy soup and salad and the mental gymnastics of calling up names, events and facts from the past.

That support and the commitment of the



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SUSAN WHITING, Executive Director of the Wolfeboro Area Children's Center, located on South Main Street, stands in the kitchen where food is cooked on the premises for meals and snacks.

board and trustees to maintain a facility that can provide care to the younger segment of our community — as early as six weeks up to 12 years. Over the years, the trustees have nurtured a strong financial foundation to ensure that parents can receive tuition assistance based on a sliding scale and can offer help to families in crisis.

It's expensive to provide year-round, daily service from 6:30 a.m. to 6 p.m. whether school is open or not, but the board, says Whiting, "takes availability very seriously." The center only closes for six holidays a year. She says that when the question came up of whether the center should remain open the day after Christmas — a Friday this year — or close, the board chose to keep it open.

Whiting appreciates having a social worker that families can consult, and speech and occupational therapists to work with preschoolers receiving early intervention. Its Special Education Administrator, Carolyn Ramsey, is also the Preschool Special Education Coordinator for the Governor Went-

worth Regional School District.

The center's special education program for ages 3-5 is approved by the NH Department of Education.

The staff has participated in nutritional training, and those principles are followed. Fresh fruits and vegetables are part of the daily menu. Parents are provided with good nutrition and fitness tips in a monthly newsletter.

The center provides sustenance throughout the day for all ages, infant formula and baby food, included. Each classroom teacher keeps track of her or his charges' activity, sleep, and eating patterns and sends a daily email home. Whiting says it is "hugely popular." Parents have told her that those daily records make them feel connected to their children's day.

These days the center is also able to provide drop-in care, part-day kindergarten, and also coordinates with Magic Moments Preschool, a lab school at the Lakes Region Technology Center, which offers preschool Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays. Soon Magic



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WOLFEBORO AREA CHILDREN CENTER teachers Bob Tuttle and Beth Dales hold group time with the school age All Stars group upon their return from school. It was the day after a power blackout in Wolfeboro that began around 5 p.m. Eager conversation focused on what children had for dinner when the power went off.



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KINDERGARTENERS arrived at the Wolfeboro Area Children's Center after school in time to gather around the table for an afternoon snack of homemade pumpkin muffin and milk in their Mis Amigos classroom. Left to right are: Jackson Scheffer, Owen Steele, Isabella Dickey, teacher Jill Fletcher, Cameron Gilbert, Avery Shields, Peyton Walsh, and Jake Dubuc.

Moments will be expanding their program to include Monday mornings as well.

Whiting enjoys being part of a high quality, affordable service to parents. That's why she's stayed with it so long, and that's why the center remains an inte-

gral part of the community after 40 years.

The WACC Facebook page is a good place to start an investigation of your childcare options and the website offers

extensive information on the staff, programs and the facility itself.

Please contact the Children's Center at 569-1027 if interested, and arrange a tour.