

WHITING

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school education offered. It evolved from a small children's program for 3- to 12-year-olds into a comprehensive child and family service organization serving over 300 families annually. There is infant care, special needs education and I am sure most of you have seen the children walking from the center to Carpenter School and back again to the center. Some of you reading this article were probably a student at the WACC. In fact, there is an attorney in town who was a graduate of the WACC and served a term on the Board of Directors of the Children's Center.

I have witnessed Susan Whiting as the executive director in action with her teachers and the other staff members who work at the WACC and the parents. As the executive director you have assigned duties and then you do whatever needs to be done, even if it is not written. You are responsible not only for the operations of the center and taking care of those who work there, you also are responsible to the Board and Committee members, and to the parents.

Susan has been a director with high standards and has put the care and future of the center first to the point of belonging to a state-wide group of Children Centers. Susan Whiting has been the public figure representing the center. She writes grants for specific programs to further educate the children and the teachers or if something is needed at the center. She sits on committee meetings and works on fundraising projects. Her door is open to all and she is available to meet with her teachers and other staff members individually if they need to talk with someone about any concerns or their jobs. Susan is available to parents to talk about any concerns they may have about their children. She has given workshops to further the growth and improve the center for

this community. She is respected by the local school district and education personnel of the State of New Hampshire because of her years and work at the center. The center has been cited by the State of New Hampshire as a program other communities should have for their children.

Some of you probably know Susan very well, maybe you have worked with her or served on a committee helping the center or maybe you or your children have attended the center. Susan has spent almost 40 years working with the children of this community. She not only has helped children, she has helped parents and has been available to different organizations dealing with children's growth.

Maybe at this point you should hear about the history of the center and how it all began.

How it all began

The Wolfeboro Area Children's Center, Inc. (WACC) was established in 1974 in response to a "Needs of Women Survey" conducted by the newly formed Wolfeboro chapter of the American Association of University Women. The need for the care of children was the #1 response on the survey. The WACC incorporated, solicited community support, hired a staff and opened in the American Legion Hall in September with 30 children enrolled. The WACC had also located a building in South Wolfeboro. It was structurally sound, had sufficient parking and playground space and the Board was able to negotiate an agreement with the owner. After this followed one of the true miracles of the WACC.

The fledgling agency, with no history, money or community recognition, just a great deal of determination, mobilized itself and the community to transform this burned out warehouse into a usable daycare center in less than three months. They moved into the building in December. Parents, Lion's

Club members, the Construction Trades from Kingswood Regional High School and local contractors worked day and night. Ninety-nine percent of the labor was donated. They only had a \$5,500 note, secured by volunteers to purchase materials (at cost from Diamond International). The septic field alone was worth \$4,000 because of all of the fill and bulldozing required, but donations of materials, labor, equipment by local contractors and gravel pits reduced the cost to \$2,000. In all, they were able to provide the \$15,000 in improvement required in the lease agreement within the first few months.

This project was the foundation of the interdependence of the center and community.

Within a year, the Board of Directors recognized the need for Family Day Care (FDC). Many of our children had younger siblings for whom affordable care was difficult to find. With the affiliation in FDC, the center's Title XX (state tuition assistance) contract funds could be used for younger children. The FDC system has ranged between five and 15 homes since 1975.

In 1976, the center recognized that there were children within the daycare population who had special needs. Lois Senecal from the Governor Wentworth Regional School District also requested placement for several children. With her encouragement, within the next two years, the Wolfeboro Area Daycare Center became the first mainstreamed Preschool Special Education Program in the State of New Hampshire to be certified by the N.H. Department of Education. It was because of the move into special education that the name of the agency was changed to the Wolfeboro Area Children's Center, Inc. Since the center's certification they have served between five and 16 children with special

needs each year in the preschool program.

In 1980, the center recognized that it could be far more effective in meeting the needs of children with handicapping conditions if they could begin working with them at birth. A steering committee was organized from related community organizations, i.e., representatives from Huggins Hospital, Wolfeboro Visiting Nurses, Governor Wentworth Regional School District and Carroll County Mental Health. Together they designed an Early Intervention Program that was eventually funded through the Developmental Disabilities Council. The center continued to provide early support services until September 2000 when services to Southern Carroll County were picked up by the Center of Hope.

In March 1985, the center opened a pilot Infant-Toddler program at a local church to relieve the emergency need for infant and toddler care. The space was much too small to meet community needs, so this move set the stage for the second miracle of The Wolfeboro Area Children's Center.

A second miracle

The center was now at a crossroad. The need for childcare had increased beyond their current capability to serve. The Board of Directors responded to this problem with a plan to increase service through the construction of a new building. A site centrally located in Wolfeboro was selected and purchased. A Community Development Block Grant and Capital Fund Drive were pursued and construction was completed in May of 1986. Through foundations, businesses and individual assistance, the building was fully paid for. The South Wolfeboro building was sold with the proceeds used to endow the new building.

The new building increased services by more than 60 percent.

It also brought about a tremendous increase in demand for infant and toddler services. While many parents would not consider childcare as an option for their very young children in the past, the quality of care provided in the new facility changed their minds. The waiting list continued to grow.

In 1991, the center again approached decision time. The programs had outgrown our space. The school age children were moved from the center to Carpenter School, to the Congregational Church, to Brewster Academy, and elsewhere in the community. They had no permanent home to set up their projects, build a library or do extended activities. They lived out of boxes.

They had to look ahead. Building and Grounds Committee assessed needs and recommended an addition to house the school age program and added two large classrooms. Once more a Community Development Block Grant and Capital Fund Drive were pursued and construction was completed in 1994.

In 2001 the center made the decision to raise money for an endowment, forming the "Mission Endowment Fund. This was a big step and a first for a child care center. The center's goal was to raise \$2 million from private funds to meet the changing needs of the community and to support parents. With Jane and Charles Hunter as the General Campaign chairpersons, along with Susan Whiting, executive director, holding the position as campaign coordinator and Shirley Ganem, as campaign consultant, \$1.5 million was raised successfully.

The Mission Statement of the center is "to enhance the social, emotional and economic well-being of families and the community by meeting the needs of children through comprehensive, affordable, high quality child and family services and to cooperate with other agencies serving these needs. These standards have always been respected and followed by Susan Whiting.

The center keeps the community working. The following statements are a few of what was said by real people in the community:

Dave Smith, former headmaster of Brewster Academy: "Brewster's faculty often times have both parents working and if the center closed its doors, the Academy would have to consider creating a facility of its own."

Sally Hunter, former owner of Hunter's IGA and now owner of Butternut's: "Over the years many of our employees have used the center for their children while working. They have peace of mind their children are safe and well take care of. The center is an asset to the business community."

Jan Brooks, principal of Carpenter School: "With parents working at the hospital, schools and businesses or traveling out of town, child care is essential early in the morning and late into the afternoon. Our community is fortunate to have the center to provide well-planned programs for our children."

In closing, let us remember the original and continued success of the Wolfeboro Area Children's Center has not been due to the efforts of just a few. Everyone involved no matter how big or small made it happen. Edie DesMarais, the original executive director and visionary of the center saw the need, acted on it, put the right people in the right places giving the center its solid foundation.

Susan Whiting has been involved with the center as executive director for almost 40 years and has continued to meld the community with the center, always listening to the needs and acting on what is necessary to maintain the integrity and success of the center. Her ideas and changes have always been implemented with the children, parents, staff and community welfare as the priority.

Susan has reinforced the strong foundation of the center throughout her career ensuring the center's success will continue to grow and continue to meet the needs of the community.