

By Erin Geismar

MAY 25, 2010

Day Care Center Growing Up New focus on educating the whole family

The East Hampton Day Care Learning Center emerged in 1976 as a product of the community's needs, offering a safe and nurturing place for parents to leave children during the workday.

In 1996, the center filled another void and took on 3- to 6-year-olds each day for the East Hampton School District's pre-K program.

Now, with the center's first pre-K class about to graduate from high school, Executive Director Maureen Wikane said the center is reaching out again, this time looking to be a center of support and education for the entire family. That effort began in April with a new membership program and lecture series, called "Living and Learning on the East End."

Ms. Wikane said the center has pooled the community's resources and invited local experts in the field of wellness and nutrition to speak at the center, located on Gingerbread Lane. The first two lectures focused on oral health and stress, and the third lecture, on June 17, will be on health and wellness for couples who want to start a family.

"I think it's the subject matter that's going to achieve the attendance," Ms. Wikane said of the series. "If we can do anything to help families in that nature, it would be an accomplishment."

The membership program will also sponsor events for children throughout the summer, and a new lecture series will reconvene in the fall, said Karen O'Connell, director of development at the center. The children's activities started with a jewelry-making program hosted by Tiffany & Co., and in July the EECO Farm will teach participants about the gardens there, allow them to pick vegetables and host a picnic lunch.

"We want to bring people to the program for activities that appeal to kids of all ages," she said, "and at the same time, bring the community information about how you can be healthy and raise a family."

"We want to bring people to the program for activities that appeal to kids of all ages," she said, "and at the same time, bring the community information about how you can be healthy and raise a family."

Gerald Curatola, founder of the East Hampton Dental Associates and a Fox News health expert, hosted the first lecture on oral health for children and also took a lead role in organizing the series. Dr. Curatola brought on Dr. Richard Ash, who practices internal medicine and founded The Ash Center for Comprehensive Medicine in New York, to head up the stress talk. Dr. Ash, who also hosts the radio talk show "Sick and Tired of Being Sick and Tired?" on WOR News Talk Radio, spoke about how emotional and environmental stress relates to nutrition.

On June 17, the final lecture in this leg of the series will be given by Dr. Caroline Fierro, founder of the Anti-Aging and Family Wellness Center in Southampton, on how the health of parents prior to conception can affect children.

The membership program has three levels of sponsorship—at \$50, \$100 and \$150—and will provide members with discounts throughout the year and tickets to special events. The lecture series is free and open to everyone, and prices for the children's programming vary by event. The money from the program directly supports the Day Care Learning Center.

Dr. Curatola said the series is something the entire community can benefit from because wellness is such a central topic in people's lives. He said he came on board to help spearhead the series because he thought the Day Care Learning Center was the sort of organization that could attract more people in the community.

"The East Hampton Day Care Learning Center is really as local as it gets in terms of community service and community outreach," he said. "They want to impact the community, and not just by taking care of the kids. This is not just baby-sitting—it's a learning program."