



CAROL HOLYOAKE

DEREK SMALL, owner of Wildlife Encounters in Rochester, and his American alligator provided some thrilling entertainment for children and their families at the Open House.



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CHILDREN'S CENTER ALUMNI Patrick Murphy, Carolyn Trepanier and Robbie Rohbaugh with Executive Director Susan Whiting (center) with the center's new logo on the display sign. It features the slogan: Family. Friends. Future.



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LEFT TO RIGHT: Richie O'Brien, Board Member; Kelly Murphy, Food Director; Nancy Jones, Finance Coordinator; and Lisa Delisle, Administrative Assistant with platters of fresh food made on site for the event.



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LEFT TO RIGHT: Toddler Teacher Assistant Samantha Miller, Magic Moments teacher Jen Larson, Board member Martha Trepanier, and Toddler Teacher Katie Smith provided parents with information on the center's programs, including family support services.

Children's Center celebrates Spring Open House

BY CAROL HOLYOAKE
Contributing Writer

WOLFEBORO — It was a bright sunny day for the Wolfeboro Area Children's Center Spring Open House last Saturday, April 11, bringing together a group of about 50 families with small children to celebrate a fun time together.

The event allowed parents to meet their children's teachers, learn about the center's diverse programs and support services, tour the recently renovated building and spacious outdoor playground, and also to connect with the dedicated volunteers who serve on the board, as trustees, or in support roles.

The highlight of the morning, accompanied by squeals of excitement and wide-eyed wonder, was the Wildlife Encounters show featuring live animals from various countries including an American alligator, an Australian wallaby and a very cheeky cockatoo from the South Pacific region who demonstrated potty training.

Equally popular was the smorgasbord of refreshments, made in the center's own kitchen and reflecting the nutritious food the children receive on a daily basis. Kitchen Coordinator Kelly Murphy explained that the food made on site is all fresh and

healthy, and made from scratch. They are looking forward to connecting kids with their own garden at the center this summer, built in cooperation with G.A.L.A.'s Sustain-A-Raiser program, and managed by staffer Lisa Delisle.

The building is obviously and lovingly designed with the little ones in mind with its bright colors, open spaces big enough to tear around on a little bike, and an extra set of windows and stair railings at just the right height for little eyes and hands. Coat hooks sit a mere two feet off the ground, and small cubbies are handy for stashing stuff. The whole place exudes fun and love, and you come to understand this more in discussion with the teachers, most of whom have been there for over 10 years and some longer than 30. They love what they do. They love working with the children, and for an organization that has been a pillar in the community for 40 years,

Board member Richie O'Brien pointed to the dedication of the staff who had volunteered their time and skills to make the center sparkle for the open house and to be present to speak one-to-one with parents. They had also made the many interpretive displays of the various programs they deliver to their small charges, who are in groups with endearing names such as Snugglebugs.

Several board members and trustees greeted people as they arrived for the open house, and like the staff, they too have long and active histories with the organization. Executive Director Susan Whiting explained that last year, in response to declining enrollment that was influenced by shifting demographics and competition, the board quickly jumped into a strategic planning session to identify key challenges and a new focus for priorities moving forward.

One of the new strategies is to expand the

reach and strengthen the branding in marketing activities, to communicate the assets that clearly differentiate this Children's Center. These would include the Center's participation in the NH Child Care Scholarship and the USDA Child and Adult Care Food programs. Also several family services run by a masters-level social worker that provide counseling, parent training, financial assistance and networking events. And significantly, that the Center has a Licensed Plus designation, which is a quality rating system that recognizes New Hampshire child care programs for efforts to improve the quality of care for young children and rewards programs that strive to improve their practices and staff qualifications.

Board member Martha Trepanier believes the Center is "one of the best assets that the town has because it allows people to work, and it offers care on sliding scale — they won't turn anyone

away. We're open 360 days a year, even when it's a snow day for the schools, from 6:30 a.m. to 6 p.m."

Both of Martha's children attended the Center and her daughter Carolyn, now a teenager, was at the Open House in her capacity as an alumna to meet and greet families and to share her happy memories of enduring friendships that blossomed there. Sharing this ambassadorial role on the day were her two friends from daycare days, Robbie Rohbaugh and Patrick Murphy, who also fondly remembered days spent at the beach, hiking and on trips that were organized by the center.

If you are wondering

what to do with your school-age kids over the summer vacation, the Center's Camp All Stars hosts 10 weeks of themed curriculum, fabulous field trips, weekly beach days, numerous hikes and many kayak trips with certified staff. The program will run Monday through Friday beginning June 22. Kids can come up to five days each week, and from one week up to the whole summer.

More information about Camp All Stars and other Wolfeboro Area Children's Center programs can be found online at wolfeborochildren.org or by calling 603-569-1027.