

Center proves a hit with tots

Toddler haven fights budget woes



Erika Grady, 2, finds a climbing toy a treat as well as a challenge.



Brett Sigworth, 2, sheds tears because he doesn't want to leave the center even though it's time to go home.



Eric Drouillard, 2, dons a fire hat as the camera zeroes in on him during a recent session at the center.

By Suzie Rollins Singer
staff writer

When Dorothy clicked her heels together in the "Wizard of Oz," chanting "There's no place like home," she never had visited the Oakland University toddler center.

Tucked away in Avon Township, at Adams and Butler, the house-like structure is better than home to kids. The center is a secure shelter loaded with climbing toys and creative settings, a place for 17 children to spend happy days.

After being closed during the fall semester because of a fund shortage, the center on Jan. 4 will resume its services for OU students with small children. It is also used and warmly respected by parents who aren't OU students.

"Even though we have a self-contained budget, we had a projected deficit for '82-'83," explained Ann Dehan, center director.

"We've cut the hours, reduced the number of professional staff and are hoping to bring in enough income to cover the \$15,000 in expenses," she said.

STATE LAW requires toddler child care centers to have a staff-child ratio of 1-to-3.

Because of the high cost of employing so many professionals, Dehan is tapping college students majoring in early childhood development to help staff the center.

"We're also asking the parents to help contribute by painting or repairing equipment or by donating items," she said.

Gerald Pine, dean of Human and Educational Services, who recommended the center be closed, said he was saddened to see the facility shut, but deficit spending is prohibited by the state constitution.

"We reopened on a limited basis. We have one director reviewing the funding, and we may restructure the program for next year," he said.

"We want to keep the program going. We're taking one step at a time, looking at spring and hoping to finance it on a limited basis," he added.

Fees are \$2 an hour if parents are students at OU and \$2.50 an hour for non-students.

AFTER THE CENTER closed, about 25 parents rallied in support of the center by writing letters to Pine, encouraging him to recommend it be reopened.

Denise Sigworth of Bloomfield Township said she attributes the center's environment with helping her son learn to talk.

"Dane was 2 1/4 when he started coming to the center. He wasn't talking, and I couldn't find anyone who would take him because he wasn't toilet-trained," she recalled.

"I wanted him to play with other kids, thinking that would help him and it did. He wouldn't be where he is today if it wasn't for the help he got at the center," she added.

Sigworth is not an OU student, nor does she work outside her home. She selected the OU toddler center for her two sons because of its warm environment and atmosphere for learning.

"It's important that we get a break from each other during the day," she said.

THE TODDLER center is divided into several areas, for various types of play activities.

There are sections for table-top play, dolls and a kitchen, puzzles, climbing equipment and bikes. There is also an area for painting and other "messy" projects.

Napping beds are on hand for full-day students. Snacks are provided for everyone.

Mary Drouillard of Ferndale makes the 20-mile drive to the toddler center because it's a "good experience" for her 3-year-old son, Eric. He was first enrolled in the center when he was 15 months old, she recalled.

"He loves it here. It's a model program of how a young child's environment should be. There is no other place like it. Sometimes I drop him off and I just go over to the library and look for something to do," she said.

WHEN THE center closed last fall, Drouillard tried another day care center closer to her home.

"They really didn't have activities for the kids. Here, the kids get busy right away when they arrive, and there's always something for them to do," she said.

Rochester resident Sharon Crady started her daughter, Erika, then 16 months, at the center in spring. Crady, an OU student, was forced to drop out of school in fall when the center closed.

"I didn't go to school in the fall because there was no place to take my daughter, but I'll be starting again next year," she said.

Staff photos by David Frank

Lunar eclipse Dec. 30; won't be back for 7 years

By Raymond E. Bullock
special writer

Early-morning skygazers will be treated to a special event in December. A total eclipse of the moon occurs on Thursday morning, Dec. 30, and (weather permitting) it will be visible from our area.

There will not be a chance to see another total lunar eclipse for seven years.

Unlike an eclipse of the sun, there is no danger in staring at an eclipse of the moon. You do not need a telescope, although you may want to use binoculars for magnification.

Eclipses of the sun and moon were probably the first astronomical events observed by ancient sky watchers. Eclipses are visible from a given area of earth infrequently, so when one did occur, the local population often became quite agitated over this unusual event.

AN ECLIPSE of the moon occurs when the moon, orbiting around the earth, passes through the shadow cast by our planet. Since the moon repeats its phases every 29 1/2 days, you might expect to see a lunar eclipse every month. You would if the moon's orbit around the earth was in the same plane as earth's orbit around the sun. But the lunar orbit is tilted 5 degrees with respect to earth's, so the moon generally passes above or below our shadow cone.

Occasionally, when moon, earth and sun are close to being aligned with each other, the moon may slide partially through earth's shadow, producing a partial lunar eclipse. Such an event occurred on July 16-17, 1981.

When the alignment is more exact, a total eclipse occurs. But only half of the earth faces the moon at any given time, so if the eclipse occurs when your half is facing away, you obviously won't see it. There was a total lunar eclipse on July 6, 1982, and it was visible from our hemisphere.

IT TAKES hours for the moon to move completely through our shadow. Sometimes only a portion of the eclipse is visible. The moon may rise already eclipsed or set while the eclipse is still in progress, which occurs Dec. 30 this year.

On Wednesday night, Dec. 29, the moon rises in the northeast at 4:27 p.m. and is high in the South at midnight. The eclipse officially begins at 3:52 a.m. Thursday morning, Dec. 30. This is when the moon enters the penumbra, the faint outer shadow of earth. Not much change in the moon will be noticed during this stage of the eclipse.

At 4:50 a.m. the moon begins to pass into the umbra, the darkest part of the shadow. The moon, located 34 degrees above the western horizon, will slowly darken from left to right. By 5:22 a.m. half the moon will be covered.

Totally begins at 5:58 a.m. This is when the entire moon is in shadow, now 22 degrees above the horizon. During the total phase the sky appears darker. The moon is illuminated by the sun and the full moon reflects the light back at the earth where it scatters in our atmosphere. During the eclipse this "moon-glow" is eliminated and fainter stars are visible. This darkening is especially noticeable out in the countryside, away from "city-glow."

DURING TOTALITY the moon will not suddenly disappear from view as the sunlight is blocked by earth. Our atmosphere bends light. This refraction is what causes the sky to take on its reddish color at sunrise and sunset, when the sun's light passes through the thickest part of our atmosphere. During the total phase, this refracted reddish light is projected onto the darkened moon, and the moon takes on a reddish-orange color.

The darkest phase of the eclipse (mid-point) occurs at 6:29 a.m., with the moon 17 degrees above the horizon. If there is a lot of dust in our atmosphere even the refracted light may be absorbed and the moon could fade from view.

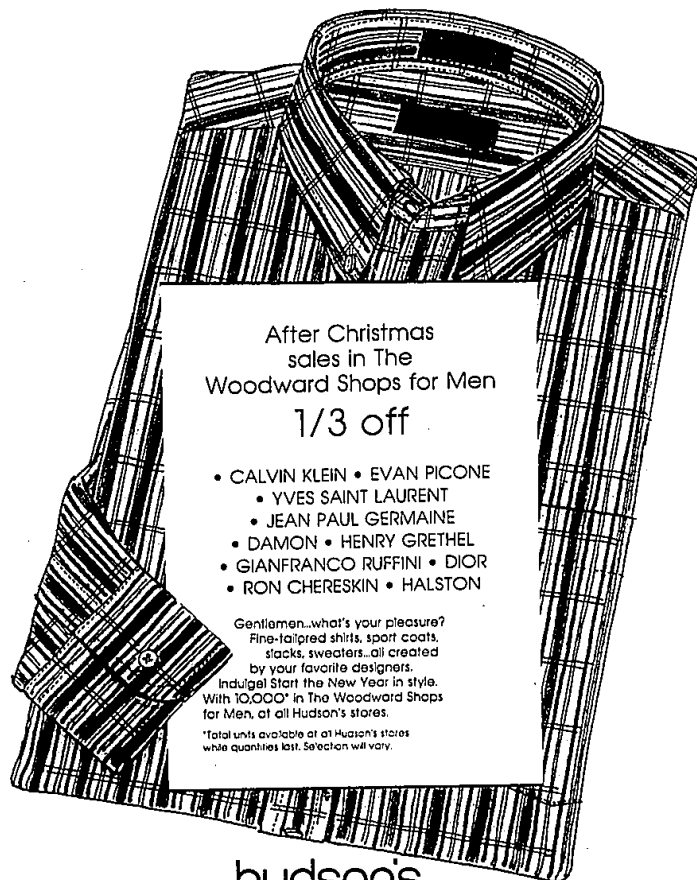
The total phase ends at 6:59 a.m. as the left edge of the moon again enters the brighter penumbra. By this time the moon is only 11 degrees above the west-northwest horizon and the sky in the southeast is brightening from morning twilight.

Once again the moon is half-covered at 7:35 a.m. It leaves the umbra at 8:07 a.m., but sunrise is at 8:02 a.m. The moon sets at 8:12 a.m., while still in the faint penumbral eclipse stage.

Since the penumbral phase of the eclipse is not spectacular, most people will find the umbral period (4:50-8:07 a.m.) the time to observe, with the total phase (5:58-6:59 a.m.) of greatest interest, although the moon's altitude decreases from 22 to 11 degrees in the west-northwest during this time. (The higher the moon's altitude, the less the distortion seen through our atmosphere.)

The next total lunar eclipse of the moon visible from our area occurs on Aug. 16, 1989, nearly seven years from now, so take advantage of December's opportunity.

Raymond E. Bullock is coordinator of the Cranbrook Institute of Science Planetarium and Observatory in Bloomfield Hills. He is also the author of "Skymatch," which appears each month in The Eccentric.



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