



A 'dream' setting

Nursery school immerse children in nature

By JUDY OWEN

Happy are those who dream dreams and are willing to pay the price to make them come true.

This concept probably best sums up Elaine Turner's philosophy.

At present, Ms. Turner's dream is a pre-school facility located on a wooded hilltop surrounded by two and one-half acres of undeveloped property that can incorporate nature into a nursery school program.

Also in her dream are Nantucket, Carmelina, Red Pony, Mindy and Panda—various animals that she believes are important in helping a child develop.

The dream became a reality Monday when the Meadowbrook Woods Pre-School Learning Center opened its doors in a sprawling, multi-level home on Meadowbrook near Twelve Mile.

The school is funded by the Rayswift Foundation, which was founded in 1934 by Marie Hasey and Edith Swift, both educational psychologists.

The two women are concerned with the early development of children—their habits, personality traits and attitudes which are established before a child reaches kindergarten.

Ms. Turner will be directing the Meadowbrook Woods program which she said will remain small.

"It's never going to be big because I don't like big programs," she said. Classes will be limited to 15 youngsters for each half-day session.

She wants to keep the atmosphere limited so that the children will get to know one another as well as the teacher.

Two staff members will be at each session. Planning for the school began last May but it wasn't until November that the property was acquired.

Ms. Turner, who has 10 years of nursery school experience under her belt, wants to create an open environment in the school.

"There will be no locked doors," she said. "If the children can reach something, they can use it."

She said that when the youngsters are enrolled, they are told not to do things that would hurt themselves or others.

"This puts the child in touch with his feelings about himself and others," she said.

"The animals come in really beautifully, too," she said.

"I like the simplistic feeling and the nature of animals."

From Nantucket, a goat who thinks it's great fun to stand atop his small house, to Mindy, a dog acquired on a field trip to the humane society, the animals at Meadowbrook Woods are definitely child-oriented. Nantucket gives kisses in exchange for cuddles.

Carmelina, a gentle horse, and Red Pony, a child-sized Shetland, are accustomed to youngsters.

Mindy doesn't like to be left out, Ms. Turner said. He slides down the slide and joins in a howling rendition of "Row, Row, Row Your Boat."

Youngsters learn to be gentle with animals

and also can apply this to their ability to get along with their peers.

She has already made arrangements with neighboring farmers to obtain small new-born animals in the spring.

Ms. Turner was at Beverly Hills Nursery School for a number of years. She left there last June with plans to operate Mountaintop Nursery School for Big Sky, a ski resort developed in Montana by the late Chet Huntley.

But those plans changed.

Ms. Turner brings a philosophy to Meadowbrook Woods that deals heavily with aiding a child in his development.

"I am a firm believer in giving children choices," she said. "You can limit the choices, but it is important in the development of a child's self-image to allow him to make his own choices."

"Otherwise, they learn to rely heavily on others to make their decisions," she said.

While reading and math readiness programs will be available, Ms. Turner said that she doesn't "believe in pushing children."

However, if a child seems self-motivated to advance to these skills, the teaching staff can provide the learning tools.

Ms. Turner described the curriculum as "completely individual."

The school will serve youngsters two and one-half years to five years.



Photographed by Harry Mauthe



ELAINE TURNER