

Nursery's founding four celebrate anniversary

By Loraine McClish
staff writer

Four women who joined efforts to form Mayfair Cooperative Nursery 27 years ago returned to open the doors for this year's class of preschoolers. The short ceremony of "opening the doors" was followed by a reception for Dinghy Sharp, Judy Cantor, Mary Ann Coll and Helen Naimark. The honored guests for the day are still residents of the area and all are professional women whose names are recognizable for the careers they set out to pursue after time spent home with their children. When they founded the school, they were forming the longest continuing operating nursery of its kind in the Farmington area. The four thought of the nursery during that time as an extension of their

own family, and Coll believes most mothers who opt to get involved with their children's early learning experiences feel the same way. "Spending time with our children when they were this age did not diminish any opportunities," said Cantor, who has since turned to a career as planner and coordinator of weddings. "I think we were enriched by staying home then. And all of the kids benefited greatly by their mothers' involvement in their growing up years."

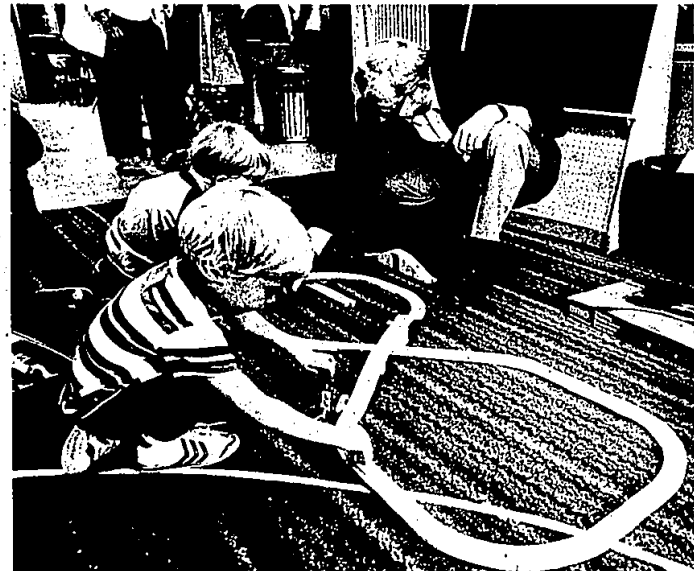
WHILE SOME things have changed, a few have remained static at Mayfair. "They are still using some of the blocks and some of the equipment we and our husbands made when we first got started," Coll said, who was Mayfair's first teacher's assistant. There is a stability of teachers, with a low rate of turnover.

And for a long while the enrollment held pretty steady with about 65 signed up for the four programs offered. As for changes, the nursery site has switched to various schools and churches within the community several times before it set up sessions in Orchard United Methodist Church, where it's remained for 16 years. But the biggest change of all was the fathers who have since entered the co-op sessions; sometimes for an entire term, sometimes periodically. "When Mayfair was started, the founders initiated a Dad's Day, during a regular session, so fathers could see what was going on here," said Nancy Hooper who is now director of the nursery. "Fathers who work afternoon shifts or who have time off during the day for any reason that come now are not uncommon anymore."

NAIMARK, who is now director of senior citizen apartments operated by the Jewish Welfare Federation, said of her children's nursery days, "Somehow the kids just turned out to be more creative." "And self-reliant," added Sharp. Sharp is learning consultant for Farmington Public Schools, heads up pre-school classes given in Fairview and Alameda Early Childhood Center, and created Bucket Brigade which is used in schools in every state of the nation and in schools for dependents of armed service personnel in 27 foreign countries. "They got an early start in adjusting to their peers, and you can't create a peer situation at the kitchen table," she said. In the early years of the co-op the founding mothers met with one another informally to discuss their problems and exchange ideas.



Mary Ann Coll, now back in classes at OCC preparing to become a medical assistant, works in clay with Brian Naparala.



Fathers are finding that they have a role in the nursery too. Here, Dick Eliofson plays with his son Andrew (foreground) and Brian Smith.

"What that led to was children who were not television oriented, but experience oriented," Sharp said. "They are not passive children." Summing up, Canton added, "The exploration that was developed as a child has led them all to be engaged in creative ways in their own lifestyle."



Dinghy Sharp, a founder of Mayfair Co-op Nursery School, works with Christine Kopacz. Sharpe was one of four guests of honor who returned to Mayfair to celebrate its 27th year of operation.



Christopher Fort is up to his elbows in shaving cream. Helen Naimark, one of the mothers who banded together to start Mayfair 27 years ago is now director of the Jewish Welfare Federation's senior adult apartments.

Staff photos by Randy Borst

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