

Education is her mainstay

By Judith Doner Berne
staff writer

The director of the new West Bloomfield School District preschool program is strong-minded with a soft touch.

Shella Oatley is better known to most township residents as an outspoken, dedicated member of Concerned Citizens of West Bloomfield and the West Bloomfield-North Farmington League of Women Voters.

Now, she's setting up the district's first nursery school with an eye to "a warm, loving, stimulating environment which will emphasize the development of the whole child."

A balanced program of activities is planned to aid social, emotional, physical, language and intellectual growth.

The new program is slated at three classrooms in the former Ealy Elementary School building, on Maple between Middlebelt and Orchard Lake roads.

Ealy was closed in June because of declining enrollment. It will reopen in August as the district's community education center.

OATLEY, WHO earned her bachelor's degree in early education from Oakland University in 1978, was picked from 14 candidates to inaugurate the school. Her salary is \$7 per hour.

For the past four years, she has run the Lakeland Cooperative Nursery at Orchard Lake Community Church.

"I'm excited about it. It's a real challenge," said Oatley, whose children David, 13, Barb, 15, and Steve, 17, attend West Bloomfield schools. She and husband, James, have lived in the community 10 years.

A school district survey confirmed community need for the preschool program, which eventually may be supplemented by day care, said Faye Mapley, program director for community education.

Both officials realize many parents

already have enrolled their children in nursery schools for fall.

"The best we can do at this point is tell them what we have and let them decide as to whether they'll come over and join us," Mapley said.

TUITION for the three-day-a-week program (Monday, Wednesday, Friday) for 4- and 5-year-olds is \$180 for 16 weeks. Three- and 4-year-old children enrolled in the two-day (Tuesday, Thursday) program pay \$120 for 16 weeks.

First semester classes will run Sept. 26 to Jan. 27 and follow the West Bloomfield School calendar for vacations and school closings.

"It's more than a co-op, but dramatically less than private nursery schools around here," Oatley said.

"We're not here to make money — what comes in goes out in salaries, supplies," Oatley said. The price is similar to preschool programs run by other school districts, she added.

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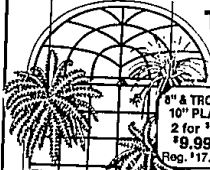
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