

Suburban Life

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ArtStart

Encouraging tots' creativity and imagination through music, art and drama

By Loraine McClellan
staff writer

A long time shopping trip for the staff of ArtStart wound up at 31195 13 Mile where preschoolers learn and develop by discovering their own creative bent have begun their full term.

ArtStart's new facilities were all but made-to-order for co-owners Sue Ingram, Barb Burgess and Kathy Benton whose shopping excursion for a permanent base ended when the Red Bell franchise that had operated there announced it was closing down.

"We had very little changes to make. The bright colors were already here, the large rooms, accommodations for

nap-taking, spacious grounds, a large playground," Ingram said.

"The biggest change was putting up the new sign. The philosophy certainly won't change."

The ArtStart philosophy, which circles around a focus on the creative arts as a learning experience, came from Nancy Bates, who got the first class of 17 toddlers together with a grant from the Farmington Area Arts Council in 1978.

The number of parents who liked what they saw stemming from that philosophy has grown consistently each year since.

ArtStart is now serving 150 families at any one given time in any of its four

programs and is listed by Social Services of Michigan as the largest privately owned school for preschoolers in Oakland County.

AS ARTSTART sticks close to its music, art and drama philosophy as a means to building self confidence and strong self-images, so does it stick to its six-to-one teacher ratio.

And as parents adhere to the philosophy by sending younger brothers and sisters to ArtStart, teachers also take to the philosophy and stay with the school.

"We have literally no turnover of staff," Benton said. "Once in a while a teacher will get pregnant, or move away, but once we get her, she's hooked. We spend a lot of time teaching her our way."

Ingram, an art teacher, Burgess, a music teacher, and Benton, who handles the drama sessions, remain among the teaching staff while still acting as administrators.

"We are teachers first," Burgess said. "We frantically had to learn to be businesswomen."

Their business skills grew with the preschool, which added a pre-kindergarten, then a kindergarten, then a dayschool, each with "a good balance of discovery time and structured time," Ingram said.

ArtStart is now open from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m./

ARTSTART HAS no competition for what it has to offer parents.

"This was an ideal community to begin the ArtStart concept," Ingram said. "We have a lot of culturally minded parents here who have their youngsters enrolled in music or dance classes before we meet them, so they are already geared in that direction. We can supplement that enrichment during the time the children spend with us."

The three women said it was not unusual to hear that one of their former students had successfully auditioned for a professional performance.

The preschool's program focuses on the creative arts in small groups and encourages socialization skills through small and large group activities.

The pre-kindergarten has the same concept with the addition of science and kindergarten-readiness sessions. Children are accepted in this class by interview only.

The kindergarten class is an individualized class to prepare the child for first grade with smaller class size, individual attention and gym twice a week.

Dayschool is an extension of the entire program with flexibility in choice of days and hours. Gym is included. Each day is individually planned to meet the developmental needs of the students who are enrolled.

Inquiries are taken by calling ArtStart's new telephone number, 628-3020.



A sign that stood for 20 years was replaced late in August by Barb Burgess (at left), Sue Ingram and Kathy Benton, who moved ArtStart into its first permanent home. ArtStart, founded six years ago, is now the largest privately owned nursery school in Oakland County.

'Thank you' party given

Bob Meizner was the guest of honor at a thank-you party given last night by parents who sent their children to Red Bell Nursery. The nursery was sold this summer to ArtStart. Meizner, who lives adjacent to the school house, was director of Red Bell for 20 years.

"This is not good-bye. This is our way

of saying thanks, our way of showing our appreciation for the good times we've had here," said Linda Mondrow, one of the party's hosts. "The new owners were very understanding about this and let us use the school for our party, because this is where we gathered for so many years."

Staff photos by
Randy Borst



Sue Ingram oversees exercises in the indoor playroom (above) with Jamie Kubat on the slide, Edwin Badik and Todd Heath waiting their turn. At right 3-year-old Todd chose to use some of his free time alone in the sandbox while other youngsters were napping.



Teacher Wendy Patillo (above) is flanked by students Rachel Patillo and Julie Stopar. At right Villa Zuribickas heads up a craft project on the outdoor tables with her charges Brooke Thompson and Kelly Neese. All members on the ArtStart staff have a teaching background in either music, art or drama.

