

BOULDER DAILY CAMERA: NOV 23, 2007
Pettem: Boulder Day Nursery celebrates 90 years

When the U.S. declared war on Germany, in 1917, an increasing number of women with children suddenly were forced to work outside their homes. Some workers left their children with extended family, but others had nowhere to turn. Members of the local Woman's Club took these pre-school-age children into their own homes, but the club women quickly became overwhelmed.

With representatives from Boulder churches and fraternal organizations, the women formed the Boulder Day Nursery Association, one of the first in the West. They found that the need for quality child care is timeless.

Now, nine decades later, executive director Steve Callander agrees.

"The nursery's mission has remained the same," he said, "and that is to provide the best possible early childhood care and educational opportunities that are both affordable and accessible to low-income working families."

For the first few years, the association operated out of rented locations on Walnut Street. A matron lived on the premises and, according to one report, had to care for up to 35 children at once. In the early days, fees for child care were a very modest 10 cents per day for regular attendees, and 10 cents per hour for mothers who occasionally dropped off their children.

The fees didn't go far in covering operating expenses, so nursery association members solicited donations by placing milk bottles in the County Clerk's office, movie theater lobbies, and in local restaurants and businesses. The grass-roots support was overwhelming and was supplemented with additional donations from church and fraternal groups, the Community Chest (predecessor to the United Fund and Boulder County United Way) and from the city and county of Boulder.

After World War I, many of the mothers remained in the work force. The continued demand created the need for a larger building and more space for a playground. Administrators were attracted to the Hannah Barker Park at Spruce and 15th Streets, and they leased the northeast corner as a site for a new building.

In 1929, well-known Boulder architect Glen Huntington drew up the plans. The nursery association, the Lions Club and the William and John McKenna families provided the \$12,000 needed for its construction.

At the groundbreaking ceremony of the 1518 Spruce St. building, Lions Club president William Casey asked, "What would life be without the children?" The Boulder Day Nursery building, still in existence, was completed in the spring of 1930 and remained unchanged until 1969 when a preschool addition was built on the south end.

In March 1970, then First Lady Pat Nixon visited the nursery during a national tour of prominent early childhood education centers. At that time the country was involved in the Vietnam War. More than 100 anti-war protesters stood outside the building, but they did not disrupt Nixon's visit.

As the nursery recently celebrated 90 years of service to children, families, and the community, it also looked to the sustainability of its future. Said Callander, "Our mission may be even more critical to the families and communities we serve today than at any point in its 90-year history."

For more information, see www.boulderdaynursery.org or call 303-442-7605.

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