

NEWS

The Evergreen State College
Olympia, Washington 98505

EXCLUSIVE FOR ELMA CHRONICLE AND MASON COUNTY JOURNAL

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College never used to be hard for Patsi Thedford of McCleary. The 1967 graduate of Elma High School says she never really had to work at it -- never, that is, until she enrolled in the "Caring for Children" academic program at The Evergreen State College last Fall.

Patsi had been attending the University of Washington, striving to earn her teaching credentials so she could work in an open concept school: "But," she says, "I didn't get to work with kids."

Now, Patsi is working hard -- at the books and with lots of kids. Mondays and Wednesdays you'll find her at the Shelton Preschool Cooperative, working as a teachers' aide; Tuesdays and Thursdays she's nestled among children enrolled in the East County Child Development Center, funded by Grays Harbor Community Action program, at Elma.

Patsi is one of 28 Evergreen students studying child development and psychology in addition to working a minimum of 16 hours per week in 17 day care centers in Thurston, Mason, Lewis and Grays Harbor Counties. She's also required to tour at least eight centers other than the two she works in, and to attend weekly seminars on the Evergreen campus in Olympia.

Patsi's instructors, Dr. Carol Spence and Betsy Diffendal, stress the importance of developing a "competency for working with children". Most of their students plan careers in education. The Evergreen program emphasizes the importance of developing abilities for work with children from two to six years of age, in addition to achieving academic understanding of the theories behind child development.

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Dick Nichols, Director
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"The students practical experience in the day care centers spurs their interest in learning more about child development," say Spence and Diffendal.

Patsi readily agrees. "I've really had to work at the books in this program," she admits. "Not because they're an assignment which must be read and then parroted back to our instructors, but because I need the information to deal with my working situation."

Patsi also finds that talking to other students in her program is a big help. And, that working in two different types of programs has given her added insight to what her instructors call "reality day care".

The Elma program, based at the Elma Elementary School, is for low income, disadvantaged children who are brought in by bus four days a week, two and a half hours a day; while the Shelton/Cooperative involves parents and children for four hours a day, two days a week.

The clientele and the problems are different. But, for Patsi, they all help provide what she needs -- an education based on the real world -- one that ties theory to practice.

Patsi plans to earn her teacher's credential after she graduates from Evergreen. She figures by the time she's completed her education, she'll be well equipped to handle any situation.