

NEWS

The Evergreen State College
Olympia, Washington 98505

CENTRALIA CHRONICLE EXCLUSIVE

Marlene McPhail feature
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When Centralian Marlene McPhail is not busy taking care of 47 preschooler youngsters, enjoying her own three children, or designing yet another improvement for her seven-year-old business, she can be found boning up on child development and commuting to The Evergreen State College in Olympia where she's in the final stages of earning a long-coveted bachelor of arts degree.

Marlene, wife of agronomist Dr. Malcolm McPhail, area extension agent for Washington State University, founded Del's Day Nursery in 1969 in the remains of the old Smethers Day Care Center at 1212 North Pearl. The building was in bad shape and Marlene is still adding to and refining the now brightly colored, well lit facility which affords a home away from home for children of working parents, throughout Lewis County.

"We've invested more than \$40,000 in the building," she says. The 3,300-square foot-single story structure is designed specifically to be "a funland for little people."

"It's one of the finest facilities in the country," according to Marlene's Evergreen instructor Betsy Diffendal, who, as a former consultant for the federal Office of Child Development, has been in more than 600 day care homes and centers across the nation.

Not only are the facilities unusually well adapted to small folks, complete with a huge indoor slide and a miniature play house, but the whole atmosphere is warm and, amazingly quiet.

Marlene credits a lot of the atmosphere to her hard-working spouse who serves as Mr. Fix It. He completed the recent addition of a full-scale kitchen and is constantly remodeling and repairing the facilities overrun with the patter of 94 little feet a day.

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Dick Nichols, Director
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But the key to the atmosphere lies in Marlene, herself. An attractive and lively lady, Marlene says she thought of founding her nursery for years before she finally opened its doors seven years ago with seven little clients.

She gradually built up the business until she had a license for 50 youngsters, and a full-time staff of six teachers (Helga Holtz, Pattie Kemp, Betty King, Billie Taylor, Leta Wilber, Karen Wilcox), and four student interns (Jeri Kerstetter, Denise Reynolds, Bill Taylor, Cindy Yoke) from Centralia High School, who earned academic credit for their work at the center.

Marlene "always wanted to go to college", and in 1972 she completed a two-year program at Centralia Community College. Still not satisfied, she heard about the Caring for Children academic program at Evergreen and enrolled there last Fall.

Along with 27 other students, she's been studying child development and psychology under the careful supervision of Ms. Diffendal and Dr. Carol Spence, who earned her doctorate in child psychology from the University of Washington. Like the other Evergreen students, Marlene is required to work at least 16 hours a week in day care facilities, and to tour at least eight other centers, in addition to her academic work which includes seminars and reading assignments individually tailored to her needs.

So far, Marlene has found the program invaluable.

"When I enrolled at Evergreen I had my own theories based on practical experience," she recalls. "Now I've found that my concepts and feelings are right."

Before entering the Child Care study program, Marlene authored a 40-page paper on the work she did developing her highly successful business. That paper, she says, has been a high point in her experience at Evergreen. "I didn't know how much I knew about child care until I had to write it all down," she says. The paper earned her 12 units of Evergreen credit (equivalent to one full year of course work) through the External Credit Office and, she says "it also gave me a great deal of self worth".

She now feels a new sense of professionalism. And, she's learned to do some things differently. "I discipline in a different way now," she notes. "I use the eyeball-to-eyeball approach with a firm grasp on young shoulders." She's also more willing to let the

children experience more things on their own -- and she's "given up being a martyr".

The Centralia co-ed says she used to work 12 hours a day at her center "and I wanted everyone to know it". She still begins her day at 6:30 a.m. when the first children arrive but she delegates a lot of the bookkeeping, cooking and other routine tasks to her crew.

"I finally realized I couldn't do everything and I learned how to delegate responsibility," she says. "It's all a part of growth and maturity." She says she's also learned the terminology of day care. "I can now label the concepts I've been applying all these years."

Proud of her Center, her home which is undergoing remodeling, and her own children (Bob 17, Cathy 13, and Bill 10). Marlene says she'll be 39 when she graduates from Evergreen in June.

"And when I do, I'm going to wear a medal around my neck," she declares.

Sounds like she'll have earned it.