



**ESSEX COUNTY IN THE PARK
INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT AGENCY**

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Preschool reborn

by: Lohr McKinstry

Adirondack Academy rescued, moves to Port Henry

MORIAH – When Silver Bay Association closed its Adirondack Academy Preschool here just before Christmas last year, there were a lot of unhappy faces on both kids and adults.

But now a group of dedicated parents and residents banded together to continue the preschool as a non-profit corporation, and it's back at a new location.

NEW SITE

The preschool moved from Yandon-Dillon Educational Center in Mineville to the St. Patrick's Church Parish Center in Port Henry and reopened this month.

"The church was very, very helpful," preschool Treasurer Jody Olcott said. "The church, the Town of Moriah and labor" for the move and renovations to the new classrooms.

Citing financial issues at all its facilities, Silver Bay closed the preschool two days before Christmas.

Now the preschool has 15 students, with room for six more, and its doing great, Site Director/Teacher Rachel Cochran said.

"It's been an interesting experience. The way this school was rescued is an inspiration."

COMMUNITY EFFORT

The operation will still be informally known as Adirondack Academy Preschool, although its official name is now Adirondack Day-Care Center/Preschool.

The Essex County Industrial Development Agency, where Olcott is co-executive director, assisted the project, whose success she attributes to community involvement.

"This center is a great example of a community evaluating its needs and being determined to continue vital resources to its residents and families," Olcott said.

"Economic development is more than providing jobs to the community; it also includes having fundamental community services available to the residents, business owners and employees who work in and around the county."



Playing in the "fish pond" at the Adirondack Academy Preschool in Moriah are students Zachary Spaulding and Madeline Cochran, while Derek Manfred watches in back. The preschool got new life recently when a group of parents and concerned residents took it over from the Silver Bay Association.

Patti Baker of Moriah has been sending her son, Zachary to the preschool and was involved in its rebirth.

“After a long and frustrating couple of months, we’re pleased with the generosity and support of St. Patrick’s Church and the community to assist us in continuing this program,” she said.

“I think providing children with educational opportunities benefits everyone.”

Olcott wants to get the word out that the preschool is back.

“I don’t want it to have the same problem, that people didn’t know it was there,” she said.

“This a great thing for the community. And our enrollment is coming along.”

POWERFUL BUNCH

Teacher’s aide Donna Healy has been with the preschool since it was Yandon-Dillon.

“They were a powerful bunch of parents to do this,” she said. “We’ve been through a lot.”

Moriah Town Supervisor Thomas Scozzafava said he’s amazed at what happened to save the preschool.

“That shows what a positive attitude can do. The mothers got together and decided the program was too important for the community to lose. They took the bull by the horns. They did it.”

FUND-RAISERS PLANNED

The Adirondack Day-Care Center/Preschool has established a capital campaign to raise operating funds to supplement tuition. Olcott said.

She said many community members and local businesses supported the school’s startup through donations of materials and labor. Several fund-raising events, like food concession booth a local fishing tournament and a drawing, have been held, with more planned for the future.

And the preschool will host some offerings for the whole community.

“The center’s Board of Directors strongly believes community and family-focused events create the environment of ‘it takes a community to raise a child,’” Olcott said.

“Our next community event will be an Easter egg hunt for children up to age 10.”

The egg hunt is at 11 a.m. Saturday, April 3, in Witherbee Park in Port Henry, with more than 1,500 hidden eggs, a special appearance by the Easter Bunny, games, food and prizes.

Scozzafava was one of those who worked to save the preschool, even before he was elected town supervisor.

“It is a program that certainly is needed in this community, with the number of working mothers we have,” he said.

“Most people might throw their hands up and say there’s nothing they can do. It’s an inspiration to the entire community.”