



The Children's Museum of the East End joined forces with Long Island Head Start last Friday morning with a ribbon-cutting ceremony at CMEE. Long Island Head Start Director of Operations Annette Harris cuts the ribbon as CMEE Executive Director Steve Long, Suffolk County Legislator Jay Schneiderman, New York State Assemblyman Fred Thiele and Bridgehampton National Bank President Kevin O'Connor look on. *heller*

BRIDGEHAMPTON

Head Start at CMEE Presents New Pre-K Options for Kids

Program targeted to lower-income families

BY CLAIRE WALLA

Against a backdrop of painted wooden trees that mark the entrance to a network of rooms filled with things meant to make children's imaginations run wild, Director of the Children's Museum of the East End (CMEE) Steve Long formally announced the addition of a new CMEE program: pre-school.

Since September 2010, CMEE has housed a class of 16 children, who were actually on hand last Friday, February 18 to display their vocal talents at the preschool's official ribbon-cutting ceremony.

Dressed in color-coordinated t-shirts too big for their petite frames, and hats that resembled ice cream scoopers, firemen and pirates, the pre-schoolers generated smiles as they gathered awkwardly before the crowd, their minds clearly wandering as they performed a medley of tunes from "Twinkle Twinkle Little Star" to "La Lechuga."

The pre-school program comes to CMEE from Head Start, a national organization, which for 45 years has facilitated programs that promote

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- STEVE LONG

early childhood development and education. There are currently 24 Head Start programs operating in Suffolk County, including one right on the Sag Harbor Turnpike, right across the street from CMEE.

"Fair Start" is maybe a better name for it," said Suffolk County Legislator Jay Schneiderman who attended the ceremony. "It levels the playing field."

Schneiderman said poverty can be "self-perpetuating," which is why programs like Head Start are crucial for setting children on the right track from the get-go.

When Raquel Barnes, assistant center manager of the original Head Start program in Bridgehampton, determined last year that there were 60 families in the area that were on the waiting list for her class, rather than sending them away, she asked Long whether or not the museum would be willing to take on a program of its own.

Long said the museum had actually been looking into housing a pre-school program around that same time.

"The former superintendent of the Bridgehampton School District [Diane Youngblood] said it would be a pre-school wonderland," Long said. "But, logistically, it wasn't going to work."

When Head Start became an option, however, the idea became feasible.

With a combination of federal funds and fundraising efforts in the local community, Head Start provides teaching staff and lesson plans for the program. CMEE provides the space.

"The [CMEE] trustees saw the need that the community had [for a pre-school program] and said we have to

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donate the space," Long explained. The students use a room off the right-hand side of the museum, which doubles for museum staff as a conference room in the afternoons and evenings when class is not in session.

According to Carol Burnett, Head Start's Community Outreach and Recruitment Coordinator, this is one of the key components of the their partnership.

"This is an ideal scenario for Head Start," she said. Some programs are housed in schools, trailers or stand-alone buildings that the organization pays rent for. But, Burnett noted that the federal government is threatening to cut 25 percent of its funding for Head Start.

Long continued, "I hope this partnership will be a model for the community and for children's museums [nationwide]." He went on to note that there are currently 400 children's museums in the country, though only one other facility works in conjunction with Head Start.

Annette Harris, Director of Operations for Long Island Head Start, highlighted the fact that there are 1,700 children who take part in the 24 Head Start programs currently operating in Suffolk County. But, she added, there is "truly a need to expand services on Long Island."

Assemblyman Fred Thiele, Jr., who was also in attendance, addressed the practical aspects of the union between the two organizations, referring to the influx of budget cuts hitting many sectors across the nation.

"We're all dealing with that in this economy," he said. "And that's why we look to partnerships. We're able to provide more together than we can do separately."

Head Start Seals Deal With Local Museum

BY COLLEEN REYNOLDS

Dressed as firefighters, pirates and other whimsical characters, 16 young children sang in English and Spanish during a brief celebration last week at the Children's Museum of the East End in Bridgehampton.

The cause for joy was a formal recognition of the partnership between the Children's Museum of the East End, or CMEE, and Long Island Head Start, an organization that seeks to expand opportunities for low-income families.

The actual pairing of the two entities took place in September, but the symbolic red ribbon was not snipped until Friday, and the smiling preschoolers who serenaded the guests in attendance—parents, employees of both CMEE and Head Start, elected officials and the media—represent the first class of students from Head Start to make use of the resources at the brightly-colored museum.

Following the childlike tune of "Head Start and CMEE go together," employees from both organizations praised the pair-

ing last week, highlighting the growing need for early childhood education programs on the East End.

"We hope this partnership becomes a model for the East End," CMEE Executive Director Steve Long said, noting that the 16 students were selected from a waiting list of 60 families who had been in anticipation of receiving early childhood education services from Long Island Head Start, which is based in Patchogue and is funded by the federal Department of Health and Human Services.

"Forty-five years later, the need is greater now than it was when it started," noted Carol Burnett, community outreach and recruitment coordinator for Long Island Head Start, about when her program formed more than a generation ago.

Annette Harris, director of operations for Long Island Head Start spoke of the newfound opportunities available to the Head Start children at the museum. "This is a land of discoveries you can touch and smell," she said. "Every child should have that opportunity."



Suffolk County Legislator Jay Schneiderman, left, CMEE Executive Director Steven Long, second from left, New York State Assemblyman Fred W. Thiele Jr., Long Island Head Start Director of Operations Annette Harris at Friday's ribbon-cutting ceremony. COLLEEN REYNOLDS