

AKRON BEACON JOURNAL

All-day, full-year preschool opens in University Park

Alliance seeks better educational opportunities in Akron neighborhood

By John Higgins
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University Park Preschool, an all-day, full-year preschool, opened Monday in new modular classrooms behind the First Presbyterian Church on East Market Street.

The preschool has slots for 40, and the paperwork for federal subsidized child care is already being filled out for 33.

The GAR Foundation is funding the preschool in collabora-

tion with the University Park Alliance, the Akron Area YMCA, the Akron Summit Community Action Inc. Head Start Program and several other partners.

The new school has two classrooms, which eventually will separate 3-year-olds and young 4-year-olds from older 4- and 5-year-olds.

On Monday, all the children were in one classroom, exploring the bright new activity centers. Some played at the sand table

with paint brushes, others had fun with the plastic animals. One girl pretended to make a chocolate cake at the kitchen center.

The school is open from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. and serves breakfast, lunch and an afternoon snack. The school day is bracketed by child care from 6:30 to 8 a.m. and 5 to 6:30 p.m. at the YMCA Hope Child Care center in First Presbyterian Church.

At circle time in the morning, children talk about what day of

the week it is and what the weather is like. Children are assigned a variety of jobs, including student of the day, calendar helper, weather helper, attendance helper, snack helper, chair monitor, floor monitor, pet monitor (no pets yet to monitor) and librarian.

Lessons on health and nutrition, art, and music and motion are also part of the curriculum. Aside from structured play, children participate in activities to build literacy, improve math and foster social interaction that lasts throughout the day.

The staff includes two Head Start teachers, two assistant teachers from the YMCA, a family support person from Head Start and the child care director, Beth Gabor, from the YMCA.

The preschool will feed kindergarten classes at Mason and Leggett elementary schools, which are in the 50-block neighborhood surrounding the University of Akron that is represented by the University Park Alliance.

Improving educational opportunities is a key focus of the alliance's efforts to improve the

neighborhood.

"This is one thing that the university is doing out of many that will continue to make this a great place for people to live," said Brenda Westbrook, a consultant working for the university.

She said the next step is to enhance the preschool's curriculum in collaboration with the Akron Zoo, the Akron-Summit County Public Library and the University of Akron.

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