

*Following is a history of the Davidson-Cornelius Day Care prepared by students professor Shireen Campbell's "Writing for the Community" class at Davidson College in 2004.*

## A Community's Vision: Davidson-Cornelius Day Care Center 1966-2002

In early March 2002, Mrs. Mary Fox spoke with our "Writing for the Community" class at Davidson College and asked for our assistance in the compilation of a comprehensive history of the Davidson-Cornelius Day Care Center.

The six of us who chose the project began seeking personal stories of those involved with the Center immediately. We spent time talking with co-founder Pat Sailstad who told us how the Center grew out of the Davidson community's response to a tragic fire that took the lives of three young children. The children perished in the fire because their African-American mother had no other option than to leave them at home alone during the day as she worked as a housecleaner for a white family. The tragedy struck in the 1950's when "day care" was not available in Davidson nor was it established as an acceptable institution.

In response to the tragedy, a group of socially conscious citizens began to address the community's need for safe, affordable childcare. Community members, church-goers and Davidson College staff united to turn the idea of a community day care center into a reality. The group purchased land, constructed and furnished a building, hired staff, and welcomed children to the Davidson-Cornelius Day Care Center, est. 1968.

The founders of the Davidson-Cornelius Day Care Center believed in a mission that would embrace and foster socio-economic diversity in a safe learning environment for young children.

Our job as oral historians was to preserve the anecdotal history of the Davidson-Cornelius Day Care Center. This was a challenging task because countless individuals worked together to make the Center a reality; contacting everyone in our given time frame was impossible. We researched past day care documents and newspaper articles and conducted interviews with co-founders, professors, board members, and current staff. Then we compiled our findings into this brief history, supplemented with photographs and "spotlights", so that future generations could learn of the Center's roots and why it is so unique to the Davidson community.

We asked current director Mary Fox why she was so personally interested in preserving the history of the Day Care Center and she responded:

*As I have gotten older and have spent more years watching the progression of [day care] rules and regulations combined with the [rapidly changing] demographics of the Davidson community, I'm very distinctly aware that if we don't preserve this history while we still have the Pat Sailstads, that nobody will be able to have the full impact. We can tell the story over and over . . . but having the personal accounts of people who were actually there 35 years ago and who heard the stories about the children who were burned in the fire is a unique advantage for us now.*

*I realized that time passes and that memory is a finite thing and that we're losing it . . . I'm invested in this whole process, because for 18 years I've done this, and that gives me the privilege of knowing just how many have benefited from this Center.*

*So if we don't get it down and if we don't preserve it in a manner where twenty years from now when people are no longer here [who saw the beginnings], then we've lost a real chunk of who we are and why we are and how we evolved from a little group of folks who were socially conscious and were aware of a need that this community was not meeting. [Back then], diversity was not something that was embraced, which to me is the thing that makes us the most unique . . . We are so different from every day care center around. And, you know, we've just got to get it down.*

It is our hope that this book will document the Davidson-Cornelius Day Care Center's unique founding, made possible by a united community's commitment to an inclusive, long-term vision of affordable childcare for all children of the community. The book can also serve as a reference point, so that the past can be remembered and lessons learned can be carried forward into the future. We believe it is imperative that the Davidson community remember the Center's historical founding and continue its support of the Center in its work to serve the young children and families of the community, according to its cherished mission statement.

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## **Beginnings**

### **Chapter One**

The original effort to start the Davidson-Cornelius Day Care Center began with a study to identify community needs conducted by the Community Relations Committee at Davidson College Presbyterian Church (DCPC) in 1966.

The study discovered a huge gap in childcare for families in Davidson and surrounding areas which spurred the committee to create an affordable, quality day care center for children whose mothers worked. The day care would be available to any child, regardless of race or ability to pay. This emphasis on a mixed classroom put the committee years ahead of many other communities of the time, especially in a town where the Caucasian and African-American neighborhoods were separated by railroad tracks. But Davidson turned out to be the perfect place for this kind of landmark day care. Davidson College brought enlightened and educated people who were interested in both quality childcare and desegregation. As Pat Sailstad, service committee member and later one of the Center's founders points out, "if it [desegregation] were going to happen anywhere, why not Davidson?"

## The Right People

Members of this church service committee eventually formed the North Mecklenburg Child Development Association (N.M.C.D.A.), which became the first Board of Directors for the Davidson-Cornelius Day Care Center on August 23, 1967. Dr. A. Gwynn Griffin led the group, which consisted of original DCPC service committee members Betty Cumming, Mary Potts, H. B. Naramore, and Pat Sailstad. Susan Abbott, James Forner, Bill Bondurant, Robert J. Stephenson, along with T. M. Poe and Bernice Houston, the committee's African-American members, joined the Board as well. In the May 16, 1968 issue of the *Mecklenburg Gazette*, Dr. Griffin explained the Board's vision: "The purpose of the N.M.C.D.A. is to conduct, on a non-profit basis, a community day care center for pre-school children including extended day services to kindergarten and elementary school children. This service will also aid the children by assisting their parents [financially] in childcare education." The committee's goals were clear and consistent from the beginning. Mrs. Houston sums up the reasons for the N.M.C.D.A. in her own motivations: "I knew that there was a great need for working mothers with small children. I felt that . . . , starting a child off and being with other children enables that child to enter school more prepared. And at that time, it was a great need."

The compassion, diversity, and experience within the original members of the N.M.C.D.A. kept the dream alive. Committee chair Dr. Griffin was a retired Davidson College economics professor, so he was able to keep the "money issues" straight. Miss Potts was the current director of Child Welfare for Mecklenburg, and her expertise not only helped the Board stay up to date about current day care issues in the country, but also kept the Board connected to the county. "She knew how many children were in need of the care," Mrs. Sailstad recalls. "She had connections with the Welfare Department which brought them in with us." Mrs. Cumming, known as the "lady with the silver tongue," was instrumental in the initial fundraising. After hearing Mrs. Cumming tell of the urgent need for day care, few people could turn her down. According to Mrs. Sailstad, "Betty's ability to move others to action with her sound reasoning, charming manner and sincere concern was a key reason for the success to raise funds to build the Davidson-Cornelius Day Care Center." Mrs. Sailstad had run a nursery school for African-American children in her own home, and many families in the African-American community trusted her. Her husband, Bob Sailstad, was the first director of development at Davidson College, so he too knew how to raise money.

## A Challenge Offered And Accepted

At that time, Wallace Kuralt was the director of the Mecklenburg County Department of Welfare. He firmly believed "the best way to cut into the poverty cycle is to provide quality day care for deprived children." With this in mind, he informed the Board that the federal government was in the process of funding communities that wish to do something about day care. He had learned about the mission of the N.M.C.D.A. from Miss Potts, and he promised that if they could get the building built, then the Welfare Department would get the funds to supply the staff and furnish and equip the building.

Motivated by this offer, the Board launched a campaign to raise \$50,000. In December of 1967, only four months after the formation of the N.M.C.D.A., the United States Treasury Department concluded that gifts to the N.M.C.D.A. would be tax exempt. After receiving tax-exempt status, board members began asking for money. Mrs. Houston, who had worked in the

home of Dr. Walter Lingle, asked if he would like to support the N.M.C.D.A. "He was thrilled to be able to donate," she remembers. And the committee was more than thrilled when Dr. Lingle, President of Proctor and Gamble Company, and his sister Louise donated enough money to purchase a lot on the corner of Jetton and Gamble Street. The location, in the middle of an already racially mixed neighborhood and next to the Child Development Center in the former Ada Jenkins School building, was the perfect location. On May 9, 1968, the Mecklenburg Gazette reported, "The idea of a [day] care center for pre-school children of working mothers has long been a goal of several leaders in the Davidson community and this Lingle gift, which has made possible the purchase of a site for the center is an answer to many hopes."

With the land purchased, the committee spent most of 1968 and 1969 raising more funds. Money poured in from Sunday School classes, churches, individuals, and companies. The Board organized community gatherings with keynote speakers on the importance of day care. At these meetings, they not only raised funds, but also raised awareness. One of the biggest gifts the Center received was in August 1968 from General Time Corporation. This gift (\$7,500) put the campaign at a total of \$17,500, though they had been in action for less than a year. Another substantial gift came from the Greater Charlotte Foundation. The Charlotte Day Nursery was to be demolished because of construction for a new expressway, and the Board was given the chance to dismantle the building. According to the *Mecklenburg Gazette*, the building committee, overseen by Davison College wrestling coach Charles Parker, dismantled, catalogued and stored partitions, doors, electrical and kitchen fixtures, and shutters for the future Center.

Mr. Kuralt, who originally helped the Center get funds from the county, gave more than financial support. Mrs. Sailstad remembers the time he gave a set of encyclopedias to the Day Care:

*One day, all of us on the staff were baffled – a brand new set of World Book Encyclopedias arrived. As the one responsible for purchasing all the equipment, the staff questioned me. 'Did I not know that our children were too young to appreciate this set of books?' Soon, Mr. Kuralt came to visit and as he entered the front room of the center his eyes hit upon the encyclopedias. 'I see you received my purchase.' When I expressed concern about the practicality of this bit of equipment for our pre-school children, his face lit up and he said, 'One big difference between a culturally deprived child and one that is not, is that a culturally deprived child does not get his questions answered. Who was I to question this wisdom of Wallace Kuralt, the father of the famous, well-informed CBS commentator Charles Kuralt? We all agreed that the World Book Encyclopedias would be used as his loving insight directed.*

On April 1, 1969, the Davidson-Cornelius Day Care Center opened a temporary location in the Cornelius Elementary School with four African-American students and two Caucasian students. Lead teacher Ray Torrance, assistant teacher Rosie Patterson, cook Joy Mayhew and acting director Pat Sailstad made up the small staff, but their dedication and hard work set the standard for all the staff that would follow in their footsteps. Rosie Patterson, a woman from the African-American community who had actually worked in the nursery in the Sailstad's home along with Ray Torrance, a recent graduate of Barber Scotia College set the precedent of having a racially integrated staff.

## **A Building At Last**

In June, 1969 with \$42,000 raised, construction of the Center on the lot on the corner of Jetton and Gamble began. Only six months later, the six children moved into the completed center that still stands today. The Center gradually added children until they reached their maximum capacity of 43, and they have always had more teachers than the state required. The building has three spacious classrooms, a well designed and equipped kitchen, a reception room, an office, a teacher's room, a "loving room" (which is used, according to Mrs. Sailstad, when "a child needs individual or special attention or as an isolation for sick children"), four bathrooms, and a basement with a furnace, laundry, and storage. One unique feature of the new building was that the Center was deemed a demonstration center and it contains observation booths. These booths are still used today by parents, students, and professionals.

The actual dedication of the center on May 24, 1970 proved to be a joyous day for the whole community. Over 200 people showed up to celebrate the opening of the Davidson-Cornelius Day Care Center. Everyone was seated outside the Center for the remarks of Dr. Richard S. Ray, Director of the Learning Institute of North Carolina. According to the *Mecklenburg Gazette*, Dr. Ray challenged the whole community to "develop a demonstration program in day care and thereby help raise the level of all day care throughout the state." The building symbolized the solidarity and commitment of the entire community. For example, the women of Davidson Presbyterian Church, Davidson's predominantly African-American church, had raised money to purchase curtains for the Center. The Lion's Club planted fresh green shrubbery donated by Smith's Florist. Even the flagpole had a story behind it. During the dedication, the Webelos Cub Scouts raised the flag that someone else had given. The whole community celebrated *their* center. Mrs. Cumming often told a sweet story of an elderly African-American man who was well known in the community. He approached her, took her hands, and simply said, "This is so beautiful and this is what our children need."

## Spotlight

### Pat Sailstad Remembers . . .

"If one person were to be chosen as the individual most responsible for the creation and survival of the Davidson-Cornelius Day Care Center, that person would be Pat Sailstad," Mrs. Betty Cumming remarked when Mrs. Sailstad was inducted as a life member to the N.M.C.D.A. in 1981. Indeed, Mrs. Sailstad has proven to be the driving force behind the Center since its very beginnings. "I had four small children at the time and I had been able to employ some of these [African-American] mothers and I wanted to help them in return for what they had done." Before the Center was even an idea, she had a pre-school in her own home for African-American children in the community. It was under the auspices of the St. Alban's Guild of the local Episcopal Church. "They [the African-American community] had faith in me," she remembers, "because they knew I loved their children." This love of children has inspired people at the Center for over 35 years, and she has carried this love with her in every step of the Day Care.

After being named an original member of the N.M.C.D.A. in 1967, she "worked tirelessly" to raise funds for the building. In 1969, when the Day Care Center opened temporarily in the Cornelius Elementary School, she served as Acting Director. When the Center lost all operating funds from Mecklenburg County in 1972, she stepped up as Chairman of the Finance Committee and was in charge of fundraising. She remained in that role for nine years until 1981 when she was also appointed Historian of the Day Care Center.

Mrs. Sailstad has seen the Center develop from a dream to a reality against all odds. Her apartment is full of scrapbooks, board meeting minutes, and pictures from the Center, and her devotion has not gone unrecognized. She has received numerous community awards for her efforts, including the Algernon Sydney Sullivan Award from Davidson College. The award is given yearly to a student or community member who has made an impact in the life of the community, and Mrs. Sailstad claims it is one of her prized possessions. Beyond official recognition, her name runs simultaneously with “Davidson-Cornelius Day Care Center”. For the last 36 years, Mrs. Sailstad’s life has been the Center, and, as current director Mary Fox sums up what Mrs. Sailstad means to the Center:

*If indeed it takes a village to raise a child, it also takes a loving, dedicated, tireless person to marshal the forces of the village. Pat Sailstad not only marshaled the forces of this village 35 years ago, she has and is still tirelessly supporting Davidson-Cornelius Day Care Center both in public and behind the scenes. Pat’s commitment to the well-being of both children and our day care center is legendary. That Davidson-Cornelius Day Care Center is alive and well after 35 years of service to the children of this area is a true testament of the efforts of many supporters. That said, we have had no bigger or stronger supporter of our work than Pat Sailstad.*

## **A Good Start**

### **Chapter Two**

If you stop by and visit the Center today, you will find that the loving atmosphere, curriculum and high standards have changed very little from when the staff accepted Dr. Ray’s challenge to set high standards for their program. Teacher and Director Ruby Houston, daughter of co-founder Bernice Houston, recalls, “the Davidson-Cornelius Day Care Center was never a nursery.” Instead of babysitting, the children had schedules and educationally-based activities throughout the day. The Center opened at 7:00 a.m. for parents to drop off their children, and most children were there by 8:00 a.m. The children had group time, played educational games, gathered around the “circle” for songs and stories, took naps, and had outside time. These activities have not changed much, even as state and federal regulations have increased. The staff receives training to stay up to date on the latest trends in childcare, which has helped the Day Care maintain consistently high ratings on all inspections. Over the first decade, the Center truly evolved into a model for the whole state.

## **Building Community**

The excellence of the Center can be attributed partly to the ever-dedicated board of directors. “There was a lot of compassion from the Board,” she says. “We had a strong board that financially, socially, and emotionally supported the Center.” The Board added several key members in the first five years. Dorothy “Dolly” Tate joined in 1970 and stayed for ten years. According to Mrs. Sailstad, her “knowledge of fundraising and her political expertise made her indispensable in the growth of the N.M.C.D.A.” Her talent took her beyond the Center, and today Mrs. Tate is recognized throughout North Carolina for her efforts to improve the lives of children everywhere.

Ms. Ruby Houston does not recall any significant problems pertaining to race within the Center during her time at the Center from 1972 – 1978. “I think if there were any situations . . . it was just people not understanding each other. People handled it in a positive manner. It was such a close-knit family and we all cared about each other.” The cooperation within the Center, the eagerness to have a diverse staff, and the reaching out to the entire community were successful because of many people. One of these people is Mrs. Esther Johnson, who joined the Board in 1970. During the Center’s first decade of operation, she proved to be a “bridge between the races.” She stayed active on almost every board committee. When she was inducted as a life member in 1978, the Master of Ceremonies noted, “every community should have an Esther Johnson.”

## **A New Challenge**

In 1972, the Center received a shock. Mecklenburg County informed the Board that the operating funds they had been receiving from the Mecklenburg Department of Social Services would be cut off due to new guidelines. Because they had depended on so much money from the federal government, and because the children paid on a sliding scale, the Board did not know how they could keep the Center open. Would their dream be shattered after such a successful beginning?

At that time, Dr. John Kelton, former Psychology chair at Davidson College, joined the Board as the new president. Under his leadership, the N.M.C.D.A. decided to launch a campaign to continue the Center and to make sure every child could get a fair start. “John’s clear presentation of our needs to the local community and specifically to the United Community Services staff and Board of Directors brought us the needed funds for us to continue.” With a loyal staff and a determined board, the Center was able to overcome a \$20,000 deficit and continue operating. Glen Lindsey, who was made a life member of the Board in 1986, stepped in in 1976 as Treasurer and implemented a bookkeeping system that helped the Board manage the funds. To this day the Center depends on personal contributions and aid from companies, foundations, and corporations.

## **Infant Day Care Trial**

In the 1980’s, the Board perceived a need for infant childcare in the area. “At that time, no infant day care programs existed around [Davidson and Cornelius],” Dr. Ruth Ault, President of the Board from 1983 – 1985, remembers. Kay Mahoney, who was director at the time, had some experience with infant day care and the options to use the current Ada Jenkins facility opened up, so the Day Care Center decided to try it out. Unfortunately, what seemed like a good idea at the time turned out to be a very complicated situation.

First of all, having separate locations was difficult. Current director Mrs. Mary Fox, who came to the Center during the last year of the infant program recalls: “If anything happened, immediately we would have to leave [the Center] and dash down and see what was going on or to fill in.” It was extra hard for teachers to have breaks because the director could not just step in to take over for a few minutes. Also, all food had to be prepared in the Center and carried across the lawn several times a day.

Most importantly, it turned out to be too difficult to support both places financially. “We couldn’t charge enough from the parents and weren’t successful enough with fundraising to make

up the difference given the low adult to child ratio we wanted to maintain.” After a few years of financial difficulties and logistical problems, and with strict infant day care regulations lurking in the future, the infant day care program closed in 1985. “It was more advantageous at that point to close [the infant] program and to merge the children into this program [at the Center] than to balance the two,” Mrs. Fox explains.

The Center recovered from the failed infant day care and kept going strong. For the tenth anniversary in 1979, Wallace Kuralt himself, who had helped make the dream of a day care a reality, visited and spoke. For the anniversary, Mrs. Sailstad went through old records and counted up at least 300 children that had passed through the Center. The number of children, teachers, parents, community members, and touched lives continues to grow every day.

## **Spotlight**

### **Ruby Houston Remembers . . .**

Ruby Houston was never a stranger to the Davidson-Cornelius Day Care Center. Her mother Bernice was an original North Mecklenburg Child Development Association committee member. Her father, Ollie, was a member of the building committee that supported the construction of the center from 1968 to 1969. Ms. Houston was also never a stranger to integration; she was a member of the first class to integrate North Mecklenburg High School where she graduated in 1968. After graduating from Barber Scotia College in Concord, NC in 1972, she returned home to Davidson to live with her parents. She began working at the Center in its third year as a teacher’s assistant. It was not an easy decision, as Ms. Houston remembers people asking why she would ever want to go into day care. When she started in 1972, day care was still not a respected profession, but she believes to this day that the Day Care Center was the best beginning for her career. “The learning experiences I gained from the Center helped build my foundation,” Ms. Houston says.

The foundation she developed at the Center proved to be a strong one. By the time she left in 1978, she had been a lead classroom teacher and eventually the director (from September 1976 to September 1978). While working for the Center, she also earned her Masters degree. After teaching at Central Piedmont Community College and working with Head Start, Ms. Houston is currently a Family Involvement Coordinator for Charlotte Mecklenburg Schools. Ms. Houston always had her whole family’s support. She remembers her grandmother asking many questions about things they were doing at the Center and reading the newsletter.

Ms. Houston remains to this day one of the Center’s most beloved teachers. Although she had to turn down the offer to be a board member, she still feels very connected to the Center. While looking over old pictures and talking about former students with whom she still corresponds, Ms. Houston remarks, “I will never be detached from that place.”

## **Fundraising**

### **Chapter Three**

From the beginning, the Center's fundraising has been vital because none of the parents pay full cost for the care of their child or children; the Center is able to supplement families' payments on a sliding scale thanks to generous donations from the community.

This original commitment made fundraising one of the first major jobs of the N.M.C.D.A. In fact, their first major task as a group was launching a campaign to secure funds to buy land and build the Day Care Center.

Generous donations from a wide variety of community members allowed the Day Care Center to open free of any debt in November 1969. Originally, the Board members accepted the role of the Center's primary fundraisers. With an annual giving program, they continued to solicit money from individuals, churches, and companies, as they still do today.

## **An Endowment Fund**

In September 1972, the county withdrew their "special funds" due to new poverty guidelines, leaving the Day Care's operation entirely to local management by N.M.C.D.A. as it remains today. In response to this withdrawal of assistance, the Davidson Civic Club donated \$600 to provide seed money for an endowment fund. Pat Sailstad describes that the prospect of an endowment fund during this financially unstable time seemed like "an impossible dream." The generous gift eased the concern for the Center's future and, in 1976, the dream became a reality – an endowment was established with Foundation for the Carolinas.

Dr. Susan Roberts recalls that the Day Care Center was the Foundation's very first client. She explained:

*We wanted to create an endowment, not just have money to pay the bills, but enough money for a nest egg. And they created a very unique arrangement with us that they didn't do with everyone else. The Foundation for the Carolinas is now a huge non-profit foundation based in Charlotte . . . and we were their very first depositor, little though we were . . . We had a small, little chunk of change there and they took care of it for a long time for us.*

Remarkably, the endowment fund had grown to \$130,000 by 1985 and it continues to grow steadily today.

## **Booster Club Serves Thanksgiving Dinner**

In the first few years of the Day Care's existence, citizens from the Center's neighborhood organized a Booster Club as a "thank you" for the services provided for their children. Each Thanksgiving, members of the Booster Club work with staff members and board members to prepare a "Turkey Feast." They gather to cook at the Day Care Center on the Sunday before Thanksgiving and then sell the food to the community. The money raised goes to special projects at the Center that are not included in the budget. This event has been a tradition at the Center since its beginning and illustrates the parents' appreciation for and dedication to the Day Care Center.

Co-founder Bernice Houston also remembers the Booster Club and the women of Davidson Presbyterian Church organizing fish fries and selling hotdogs to raise money for the Center.

## **Withdrawal of County Funding**

In 1986, the Center's future was clouded by the announced intention of the County Commissioners to cut off its more than \$21,000 of annual funding. The first issue of "Wee Care," produced by N.M.C.D.A. in 1986, illustrates the Day Care's response to this hurdle. Under "Fundraising News" it reads:

*Jan Grigsby, Fundraising Chair for our Board of Directors, reports that this year's solicitation of individuals has doubled the number of contributions to the Center. The Phonathon held at the Cornelius branch of First Union Bank last November was a successful new strategy – special thanks to organizer Susan Abbott and to Cornelius branch manager Tom Dutton, who graciously lent us his telephones. Our solicitation of businesses is now underway and we are hopeful that the remaining individual contributors will provide us the \$7000 we still need to reach our goal of \$20,000.*

The Board obviously focused heavily on fundraising during this time in order to compensate for the lack of funding from the county. Fortunately, Gail Gibson, a professor of medieval literature at Davidson College, joined the Board as president elect in 1986, soon after the withdrawal of county funding. During her presidency from 1986 – 1989, Dr. Gibson organized community and parent appeals to the county, which succeeded in delaying the funding cut-off date by a year and then in increments over a three-year period while the Center sought alternative methods. During this time, Dr. Gibson identified new sources of funding such as the World 600 Children's Charities. She also reorganized the structure of the Board to emphasize fundraising and long-range strategic planning.

In order to cultivate the physical and human resources of the Pines Retirement Center, she also began a liaison with the Pines, enlisting Eddie Muller as Board member. Along with Mary Fox, they organized children's visits and presentations to the residents about the Center.

## **50's Rock n' Roll Dance**

Dr. Gibson's most famous association with the Day Care, however, began in 1988 when she inaugurated the first annual 50's Rock n' Roll Benefit Dance. She recalls the origins of the event:

*I came up with the idea in conversation with Ruth Pittard . . . I think it was the end of the year picnic; we were sitting outside on the grass . . . and it was just before the summer that I was going to be 40. And so I said, "Well, let's have a rock n' roll dance. I will invite all my friends and instead of having them bring presents maybe they will make contributions to the Day Care." She said, 'Oh, great, and I will try to get the Union Board involved.' The first dance . . . was basically my friends, and we did it over in Vail Commons. And I had such fun doing it; we were just kind of making up the project as we went along. With Ruth's help, we got the Union to help sponsor the event. So we basically didn't have any expenses . . . anything we took would be profit. And they really had a good time, and they had such a good time that they wanted to keep doing it. I think they are still doing it for next year . . . they have*

*been doing this rock and roll dance now for quite a while because I am going to be 54 this summer and it started when I was 40!*

Dr. Gibson coordinated the dance for eleven years and has recently tried to take a smaller and smaller role, although she still provides the music and the door prizes. She remembers the year when she forgot to go to one of her Friday classes because she was so preoccupied with preparations for the dance that weekend.

She says, “. . . it was getting to the point that either I was getting Alzheimer’s or I was trying to do too much. So at that point I became . . . in charge of various things about the program, but not in charge of everything.”

The event has become a community tradition, with poodle skirts, burgers from White Castle, a milkshake bar, door prizes, an Elvis impersonator, and dance and hula hoop contests. The dance takes in about \$5000 annually from tickets and is great publicity for the Center. Dr. Gibson explains, “It tells the freshman class about the Day Care . . . and kind of establishes the role of the Center.”

Georgia Ringle, health educator for Davidson College and former Board president, comments on the 50’s Dance and the push for fundraising during these years:

*We wanted to make sure that they could keep offering scholarships, and Gail [Gibson] had a wonderful idea with the 50’s Dance . . . a great thing for getting the college involved. We wanted to have some good fundraisers to help Mary [Fox] with her tough job of keeping the standards so high. Those were big years, powerful years in making the center strong and stable. The Board really worked hard to come up with some huge fundraising ideas . . . it was exciting for me to see the Board play that role. I think that it’s outstanding and the Day Care Center is known for, since I’ve been in town, the one big push for money once a year. They send out a flier and the photos were always . . . by Frank Bliss . . . these photos were very moving and very engaging. They really pull you into the Center.*

## **Day Care Endowment Benefit**

In March 1990, Dr. Gibson and the other 24 Board members also worked on a fundraiser entitled “Davidson: A Community Endowed with Talent,” a silent auction showcasing the talents and services of the community. Tickets cost \$10 and it was held in Vail Commons. Items in the auction included: an original framed etching by Herb Jackson, a portrait session with a local photographer, a free week at the Wildcat Adult Tennis Camp, shag lessons, and a weekend getaway to the Carolina coast.

## **Capital Campaign for Playground Equipment**

Before serving as President of the Board of Directors from 1997-99, Dr. Susan Roberts, a political science professor at Davidson College and Day Care parent, was the director of the Center’s capital campaign to raise \$200,000 for new playground equipment. Dr. Roberts explains the campaign:

*We wanted to be . . . as we've always wanted to be, on the forefront of quality day care. And, so, we endeavored to raise \$200,000 . . . the first time we've ever done that . . . it was going to cost and did cost about \$100,000 to replace both playgrounds with quality equipment . . . with fall zones, head spacings. And it involved raising money from corporations and again from our friends, and we were lucky enough to get some contributions from a few individuals such as Bruce Parker, whose dad had been involved in clearing the land for the day care.*

Bruce Parker generously donated \$50,000 for the capital campaign and the Board awarded his family a picture of his father on a tractor, clearing the land for the Day Care Center.

## **Davidson Cornelius Day Care Road Race**

In 1996, Dr. Roberts organized the first annual Davidson Town 5k Race to sponsor the Day Care. She chose this fundraiser because, as an avid runner, she knew a lot about these events and she thought it would be a new and fun addition to the community. The race has been very successful and is now one of the signature fundraisers for the Center; all proceeds go to the Day Care Center. The sixth annual race will be held this year. Dr. Roberts comments on fundraising for the Center:

*I think the challenge for people like me who want to give all their volunteer time to the Day Care is to build up that money so that we have the provisions, because every now and then the water heater breaks or something like that. And you can't just send out a cattle call for money, but you must try to be prudent.*

## **Spotlight**

### **Gail Gibson Remembers . . .**

Dr. Gibson moved to Davidson in 1983 and immediately became involved with the Day Care Center when her two-year-old daughter needed childcare. She explains that, "except for a co-op situation, the center was the only possibility" and points out the lack of community awareness then concerning the need for day care in the area. Dr. Gibson became very interested in the Center, which "did not have as much stability as it does now in terms of staff." She sensed this need and tried to be supportive.

Now a life member of the Board of Directors, Dr. Gibson served on the Board for five years (1983-1987) and her most famous association with the Center arose when she was President of the Board from 1987 to 1989. Because the Center was struggling with funding, she organized the 50's Rock n' Roll Benefit Dance which still remains very popular today.

"I think that people, if they mentioned my relationship to the Center, would talk about me as the party-giver . . . I do think that service is a joyful thing, so I'm glad to be known as the Elvis fan."

In 1983, Annie Gibson was one of the few Caucasian children in the Day Care, so Dr. Gibson "felt very strongly that the Center had the potential to be a kind of genuine intercultural and multiracial experience that would be a very positive thing for the community." Dr. Gibson explains that Annie still visits the Center when she is home and maintains a relationship with her preschool

teachers and friends. She says, "It was really good for her . . . she learned things about people different from herself in ways that have influenced the person she is now."

Dr. Gibson was also involved with the 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Luncheon and the silent auction. And although she has passed on some of the responsibility for the Rock n' Roll Dance after organizing it for 14 years, she still keeps a large closet at home full of tacky 50's paraphernalia for door prizes!

## **Community**

### **Chapter Four**

The Davidson Cornelius Day Care is central to the Davidson community in two ways: it helps to bring the community together in a common cause, and it fosters rich developmental growth of the community. Since its beginnings, the Center has been a community effort that has brought together a diverse group and given them a common cause. From its humble beginnings in the Community Relations Committee of the Davidson College Presbyterian Church, to its ambitious drives for funds, the Day Care has reached out to the Davidson community and beyond. Invitations to fundraisers, requests for teachers and mentors, and informational brochures are just some of the ways that the Day Care Center has reached out.

Georgia Ringle, a counselor and health advisor at Davidson College remembers just how intertwined the Center was with the community when she first moved to Davidson: "I'm amazed that I can't remember really what hooked me first to it . . . that just kind of shows you how melded the college community is to the Day Care Center and the Davidson community, because just by being in town I got pulled in and interested."

### **The Day Care Gives Back**

Community members have contributed to the Center in myriad ways over the course of its history. Georgia Ringle remembers Frank Bliss, a professor of English and renowned photographer who contributed to the Day Care by taking pictures of the children and donating his art to the Center. Mrs. Ringle also remembers when Eddie Muller, President of the Board from 1991-92, used to have board meetings at The Pines dining room. She says that this was his way of giving a treat to the people who worked for the Day Care Center.

Mrs. Sailstad was amazed at the different ways that the entire community supported the Center:

*I do want to just tell you how much the whole town supported us. The Lions Club donated the shrubs and planted them. Curtains that had once been hanging in the African-American church's recreation room – they took them down and gave them to us to use. I can't begin to tell you all the things you will find in the newspaper articles. People who gave money. Our furnace! Even our furnace. And the furniture, we still have it. The little stools . . .*

Aside from the many ways that the community came together to create and sustain the Day Care Center, the Center has really given back to the community. Mrs. Ringle remembers that it used to be a little scary to go over to the Day Care Center. The two sides of town were really two separate communities, and there was some fear of the unknown side of town. The integration,

both socio-economically and racially, that the Day Care Center offered helped to break down the barrier. "I think what was so unique about this Day Care Center was the integration and scholarship," Mrs. Ringle remarks. "I mean it was integrated before Davidson Elementary!"

Ruby Houston says "[The Day Care Center is] the fruits of the labor of a community that pulled together." Many other members of Davidson have recognized this effort. Mary Fox is impressed with "how we evolved from a little group of folks who were socially conscious and were aware of a need that this community was not meeting, and that diversity was not something that was embraced, [to where we are now.]"

## Spotlight

### Georgia Ringle Remembers . . .

Georgia Ringle served as President of the Board of the Davidson Day Care Center from 1990 to 1991. Georgia moved to Davidson in 1986 as the wife of a professor. Before attending the School of Public Health at Emory University for her Masters in Public Health, Georgia had worked with developmentally delayed infants and their families. She also had experience as a health educator. When Georgia moved to Davidson, she was not ready to go to work full time because she had a child who was only a few months old.

Because of her interest in children and psychology, she first went to the Day Care Center to help with a Davidson College psychology class that was using the observation booths built into the day care classrooms. Georgia said that when she went to the Day Care Center she met Mary Fox. "I fell in love with Mary Fox. She's the whole reason I'm involved with the Day Care Center." Then, Georgia began helping with the Center's curriculum. She helped review what they were doing, examined different developmental approaches to day care, and began to work "very, very part time."

Georgia reflected on some of her fondest memories of her involvement with the Day Care Center: "One [memory] that I still miss is when I would go in there and have a hot biscuit. It was always in the morning and it was always so great and there was butter and ham and juice, you know it would really start our day. That was always a wonderful thing, home cooked meals."

Through her part time volunteer work at the Center, Georgia became a close friend of Mary Fox. After working on the curriculum for a few years, Georgia served on the board and then became President of the Board in the early nineties. During Georgia's tenure, the board worked hard to make the center strong, stable, and self-sustained. She wanted to ensure that the Center would not have to be so preoccupied with financial concerns and could continue to offer scholarships. Although the board was focused on the long-term financial concerns of the Center, Georgia stayed focused on more of the day-to-day happenings of the Center.

*Oh, I do have a bad story about me, in that being a new mother I recommended [ . . . ] they watch Sesame Street in day care. I mean, it's such a great program and that was always my little nap time, you know? Mary [said], 'We cannot have TV be a part of the curriculum!' But, you know, that's just what I did. I thought it was a good program and I love the songs and it has good values; but of course, those kids are gonna go home and probably have [TV] time at home . . . some more than others . . . probably much more than they need.*

Although Georgia did not take advantage of day care for her own children because she wanted to be a “stay-at-home” mom, she knows the Davidson Day Care Center is a valuable and needed service.

*I do want to say something about day care, though, given the times. [Given] society and human conditions, [ . . . ] it is so tough for young families to find somebody who can take their children, in what they feel is a safe enriching environment and that will actually feed their kids, emotionally [and] intellectually. I think that the Day Care Center has been a real star in all of that. The Day Care Center serves a real need and so many people need to use it.*

The stability and commitment of the staff, given the pay, amazed Georgia. Mary Fox, the director of the day care center for eighteen years, especially awed Georgia.

*Mary Fox is a fabulous person. I cannot say enough about her. She really listens to each family. She really gets to know the children. I've seen Mary . . . when the cook was sick and we'd have to go to the grocery store and we got in [the kitchen] and we're like 'Okay! What now?' But we'd feed everybody and load up these trays and try not to have too many complaints on the other end.*

## **College Connections**

### **Chapter Five**

The Davidson-Cornelius Day Care Center has strong ties with Davidson College. In a letter dated March 1, 1966, William Terry, the minister of the Davidson College Presbyterian Church (DCPC) made a request to Mrs. R. J. Sailstad:

*Dear Pat:*

*Our church has reorganized its committee arrangement for the Session's committees. We would like for you to serve on the Service Committee. This committee is primarily concerned with human relations and community activities . . .*

By August of 1966, this committee recognized the need for day care in Davidson and sent a letter to the members of DCPC:

*Dear Members of Davidson College Presbyterian Church:*

*At its meeting on August 4, the Session endorsed wholeheartedly a campaign among our members for the Davidson Day Care Center. Our rationale for such an endorsement is theological and practical.*

*We are mindful of our Lord's special concern for little children. We are aware that we are not to cause them to stumble and that the circumstances of neglect under which some of them have been living while their families worked have been a cause of much stumbling.*

*As a session our hope is that you will be moved to be generous in your gifts to build the new Day Care Center.*

Here began the College's connection to the Day Care Center and that connection has continued over the past thirty-six years. Many Davidson students and professors have contributed time, money and energy to help support and foster the growth of the Day Care Center.

In the late seventies, Davidson helped sponsor a Christmas benefit for the Day Care Center. The College's male chorus led the community with Christmas vespers in DCPC. Following the music, the community ventured on a tour of various homes and buildings that were decorated for the holiday. Several college and community groups decorated Christmas trees in different historical styles. The trees that comprised the town tour were in Philanthropic Hall, Eumenean Hall, DCPC, the Carolina Inn, the Grey House, and the former railroad depot. Also, several homes on Main Street were included in the tour, which ended with a tree at the Day Care Center that the children decorated.

Davidson students were involved with the Day Care Center by helping with manual labor, raising funds, mentoring, and tutoring. Twenty-five Davidson students arrived at the Day Care Center on April 28, 1979. They raked, fertilized, trimmed and mowed. They also cut the edges of shrubs, spread pine bark around plantings, and planted a cherry tree.

*Three days a week, junior John Kenyon walks off the Davidson College campus, across the railroad tracks, and up a winding road into the world of children. For three hours he talks with them, reads to them, feeds them, plays with them, disciplines them and comforts them. For some of the children he is the only adult male they feel close to. For all of them, he is a friend. (The Charlotte News, Thursday, February 25, 1971)*

Kenyon said that he really enjoyed working with the children because it showed him how some of his psychology courses applied to real life. It also helped confirm his passion for educating children, which he pursued after graduating from college.

Davidson students have also worked to raise money for the Day Care Center. In the winter of 1973, The Fellowship of Christian Athletes, the Student Government Association, the Residence Hall Association, and the Alpha Phi Omega service fraternity worked together to raise \$1500 for the Day Care Center. The following year, Davidson hosted a Silly Putty sale at the Davidson College Homecoming Country Fair, to benefit the Day Care Center. In 1976, Katherine Morton, a Davidson College junior, raised over \$3000 for the Day Care Center in just a few days. "The very idea of trying to pull off a twenty-five hundred dollar fundraising endeavor in a span of four days is rather overwhelming – but the fact that we were able to witness the actual success of it is thrilling." (Katherine Morton, quoted in *Mecklenburg Gazette*, January 14, 1976)

Unfortunately, college students are no longer able to volunteer at the Center due to federal regulations that prohibit anyone coming into contact with the children in the Center without an FBI background check. Although student volunteering no longer exists, past volunteers have benefited from their experience at the Day Care Center. According to Pat Sailstad,

*Two former Davidson College students who assisted at the Center under a special grant from the Learning Institute of North Carolina both said the Center changed their life goals. One is now the principal in a large metropolitan high school in Virginia (Kenyon) and the other has just been chosen as the director of a large foundation. Both men are committed to quality developmental care for all children.*

Through volunteering at the Center, Davidson students were able to experience firsthand a job as a day care teacher or assistant, to expand their involvement with the local community and to create strong ties to the Day Care Center.

## **Demonstration Center**

### **Chapter Six**

When the Davidson-Cornelius Day Care Center opened in November of 1969, Mecklenburg County designated it as a demonstration center of proper childcare. The Center's founders focused on providing the children with their emotional, physical, mental, and social needs. Within the Center, the founders and county agreed to build observation booths. "Early on, when the Center was built, observation booths behind screens were constructed with the thought that the Center could be used for research and training," says former board president Dr. John Kelton. Those observation booths continue to benefit the Davidson community today for a variety of reasons.

### **Observation for the General Community**

The observation booths help parents considering sending their children to the Day Care watch activities through the observation windows without disturbing the children. Parents of current students can watch their children's behavior and progress at the Center without their child being affected by their presence. Those parents also use the observation booths to make sure the program is meeting their child's needs.

Other day care center directors used the observation booths to develop ideas about their own centers. According to Mrs. Sailstad, "staff from Central Piedmont Community College, Johnson C. Smith, Barium Springs and North High School used the observation booths in their staff training as did the many centers that opened up under the Department of Social Services."

### **Davidson College and Observation**

Davidson College uses the Day Care Center frequently in order to observe child behavior. Students involved in education, child development, and animal behavior classes have been known to watch children through the observation windows. Dr. Ruth Ault, a psychology professor at Davidson College, often teaches the child development class to give her students three assignments per semester in the Day Care Center for observation. Each assignment requires two to three visits to the Center. Each visit represents a different type of observation. Dr. Ault explains:

*During the first observation, [the students] are simply learning the techniques of data collection, so they observe whatever the children happen to be doing – usually free play. [During] the second observation, they are specifically looking for episodes where (a) one child imitates another and (b) one child reacts to another with praise,*

*material reward, protest, or aggression. The third observation topic is up to the student within the constraint that they are to focus either on prosocial behaviors (helping, sharing, obeying requests, etc.) or antisocial behaviors (hitting, yelling, denying requests, refusing to share, etc.).*

The Day Care has fulfilled its role as the “demonstration center” of childcare in the area. Davidson College uses the Center academically, while others in the community look to it as the prime example of what day care should provide. The Center seems to serve as a link between the College and the Center, as well as the community in general.

## **Spotlight**

### **Ruth Ault Remembers . . .**

Dr. Ruth Ault, a psychology professor at Davidson College, first became involved with the Davidson-Cornelius Day Care Center through the recommendation of Dr. John Kelton, a fellow Davidson professor. When she arrived at Davidson College in 1979, and began teaching Child Development and an Introduction to Psychology class, Dr. Ault developed a relationship with the Day Care Center through volunteering and helping the teachers with the behavior problems of a few children. In the fall of 1982, she joined the Board of Directors, and later that spring was elected President of the Board. Dr. Ault held the position of Board President from 1983-1985, President-elect from 1987-1989 and then was reelected President from 1989-1990. She continued as a board member until 1992, and has since been voted a life member of the Day Care Center.

Through her involvement with the program, Dr. Ault supported the use of the Day Care Center as a demonstration center for her child development classes. The students have brought back funny stories from the Day Care Center:

*Two of my students were observing in the two-year-old classroom, and they picked a little child that they thought was cute, and they were watching her for a while. They noticed that she had dropped down onto the floor, out of their sight. They were leaning forward, and waiting for her to come back, and all of a sudden she seemed to appear in a totally different location. They couldn't figure out how she had gotten from in front of the screen to in front of the bathroom. Then the girl in front of the screen popped up, and they realized that they had selected an identical twin, and the other one had been in the bathroom so they had not known that there were twins!*

In Dr. Ault's opinion, the Center has benefited the community in more ways than simply providing funny observation anecdotes. She says that the Center “. . . has remained one of the very few truly integrated centers. A number of the private facilities tend to cater to only wealthy clients, and [the Davidson-Cornelius Day Care Center is] certainly one of the very few that offers the equivalent of scholarships for poor kids. That diversity, both socio-economically and racially, I think has enhanced the community.”

## **Personal Perspectives**

## Chapter Seven

As the co-founder and first director of the Davidson-Cornelius Day Care Center, Mrs. Pat Sailstad gave a speech to the new board members on October 17, 1985. She referenced a survey done for the Center's tenth anniversary in 1979 and noted that "approximately 300 cumulative records were counted in our inactive and active files at that time. That number must have doubled by now [ . . . ] My guess is that approximately 1,000 parents/children have been recipients of our 'quality care'."

The statistics grow as the Center moves through the new millennium. But can the success of the Day Care Center solely be based on the number of children who belong to the program? Of course not. The Center provides care for people, families, and children. From their experiences at the Day Care Center, these moms, dads, children, and friends have collected impressions, connections, and anecdotes.

### Changed Children

One mother in the area desperately needed to return to work. Without childcare, she left her young daughter at home watching television. She just plopped her child down in front of the television for constant entertainment. Fortunately, the mother finally enrolled her little girl in the Day Care. However, when the child first got there, she refused to play and learn with the others. She only wanted to sit in front of the fish tank and stare at it all day long. She had watched television for so long, that the closest thing to a TV was a fish tank!

According to Dr. Susan Roberts, the little girl's story is exactly why the Day Care Center is so important. "There are some children there whose parents are probably teaching them French at the age of two, and there are children whose parents don't have the means or the resources and desperately need the childcare that the Day Care provides and the social structure."

Dr. Roberts learned firsthand the unique interaction that children have at the Center. In fact, she was impressed when her son Cormac, then a student at the Day Care, came home one day and called her a "home girl."

Dr. Gail Gibson's daughter, Annie, also exemplifies the Day Care's multi-cultural influence. Annie first attended the Center in 1983 when her family moved to Davidson. From age two to five, Annie went to the Center while her mother taught at Davidson College. Dr. Gibson recalls that Annie was "one of the few Caucasian children in a day care center that was mainly serving African-American children." As a mother, she loves that Annie knew children from the Day Care and maintained friendships with them through high school. "She learned things about people different than herself in ways that have influenced the person she is now," Dr. Gibson observed. As a Spanish/Portuguese major with a focus in Latin American Studies, Annie is presently studying abroad in Rio de Janeiro. Even now, she is interested in the cultural differences that she discovered at the Center. Dr. Gibson periodically sees Sarah Gant, the woman who taught Annie when she was five-years old. Amazingly enough, the teacher still asks about Annie and still recalls details about her time at the Day Care Center. For example, her teacher remembers Annie's reaction to the chameleon that she brought to class one day to show her students. As Dr. Gibson says, "Every single child that passes through that class remains in her heart . . . it's amazing."

## **Dedicated Staff**

The Davidson-Cornelius Day Care Center owes its personality to its staff. Amazing individuals engage children with more than just fish tanks, downplay the importance of socio-economic differences, and fill all of the cracks in between. The children not only have lasting friendships with the other children, but they form relationships with the Day Care's staff and volunteers.

Miss Martha, a cook at the Day Care, loved Ragu sauce almost as much as she loved the children. She would drench her spaghetti in Ragu, and Dr. Roberts' younger son, Jack, would devour it. In fact, he refused to eat spaghetti at home unless his mother told him that she had Miss Martha's special recipe and that the spaghetti sauce was exactly the same as at the Day Care Center.

However, when Miss Martha, or whoever the cook at the time is, cannot be there, Mary Fox takes over. She jokes that whenever they serve hot dogs, or soup and grilled cheese sandwiches, the children shout, "MaryFox must be cooking again!" Although Mrs. Fox (who the children call by one name, "MaryFox") may not have the most extensive cooking repertoire, she surely extends her role as Davidson-Cornelius Day Care Center Director.

Dr. Roberts tells the touching story of the Day Care's role in her son's battle against leukemia. Jack's teacher, Miss Vonnie had called Jack "Jack Rabbit," because he bounced all over the place like a ball of energy. When Jack was diagnosed with leukemia, he needed a support group. The name of the support group became "Jack's Rabbits."

Day Care connections supported Dr. Roberts even further when Jack was having problems with an unrecognizable rash. She took him to their family physician, Dr. Craig White, who happened to be on the Board at that time, and he sent them to the hospital. "The first person I called was Mary Fox at the Day Care, because she was such a good friend," Dr. Roberts remembers. Mrs. Fox called long-time board member and friend Mary Beth Kuzmanovich to meet Dr. Roberts at the door.

The Day Care's staff and board have supported many such children and families through rough times. One boy named Philip had neuro-muscular disabilities, and the Day Care provided the perfect environment for him. The Day Care's natural sincerity and individual attention is one of the reasons, as Dr. Roberts points out, that "the Day Care's been very special from that perspective."

Crystal Forney exemplifies the satisfied and well-connected Davidson-Cornelius Day Care Center family. Ms. Forney actually went to the Day Care as a student, and now three of her children have gone to pre-school there. She commends the staff, saying, "They're all wonderful. They know you by name. They tell you what's going on." The teachers still ask about her fourteen-year-old child.

## **Connected Kids**

In addition to the staff and volunteers' impact on the children, the children leave quite an impression on each other. In most cases, connections at the Center do not fade easily. According to Dr. Roberts, Cormac met one of his best friends at the Day Care. Matt Manning, who grew up in

Cornelius, went to pre-school with Cormac but did not go to Davidson schools. The two boys played on the same recreational sports teams, Dr. Roberts had gotten to know his parents, and they have stayed in touch since pre-school.

Even if the children do not keep in touch, they still have those connections. Dr. Roberts and her son Cormac were shopping and a young, African-American woman kept looking intently at them. Finally, she approached Dr. Roberts and said, "Does he have . . . how old is he?" "Well, he's eight," she replied. "Does he have an older brother? Is his name Cormac?" she asked. Amazingly enough, the girl in the grocery store had a cousin named Okeeylah who went to the Day Care with Cormac. Dr. Roberts instantly remembered Okeeylah. Okeeylah's cousin recognized Jack as Cormac's little brother even though she had not been at the Day Care with either of the boys!

Throughout the Day Care's history, people have constructed facilities, given money, and volunteered time all for a common purpose: to enrich the lives of children. Quantitatively, this purpose is difficult to measure. How can the Center be sure that it has changed the lives of its students, staff, and parents? Statistics cannot accurately relay the effectiveness of the Day Care. Anecdotes are important parts of the Day Care's history. These stories tell about only a few individuals; we wish we had enough paper and patience to include every single story!

## **Spotlight**

### **Susan Roberts Remembers . . .**

Living in Davidson, North Carolina and commuting to South Carolina every morning is tough. In the early nineties, Dr. Susan Roberts commuted to Furman University, a 125-mile drive, three or four days a week and spent the night one or two nights a week. As a professor and the mother of a two-year-old, she needed a safe environment for her son to learn and play while she could not be with him. She found and fell in love with the Davidson-Cornelius Day Care Center.

"The Day Care became my salvation," Dr. Roberts explained. "I can remember many times, many days . . . flying back down the highway to get there on time. And, they have very generous hours . . . I began there as a parent with a child at the Day Care and became so convinced of the great experiment that they were doing in terms of mixing people from all socio-economic and racial backgrounds that that's really how I first became involved."

When her son Cormac entered the two-year-old class, she got involved as a parent. Cormac's first Day Care facility in Rock Hill had a parents' newsletter, and Dr. Roberts suggested a similar newsletter for DCDC. Her commitment only grew from there.

The Board of Directors asked Dr. Roberts to be a member shortly after Cormac began attending the Day Care. As Vice President of the Board, she led a capital campaign, and she still writes grants for the Day Care Center. She started a community 5k race to support the Day Care in 1996. In 1997, '98, and '99, Dr. Roberts served as President of the Board.

Dr. Roberts also has a younger son, Jack, who recently attended the Day Care Center. Jack's relationship with the Day Care staff is especially amazing. They have loved and supported Dr. Roberts and Jack through his struggle with leukemia. The personal and loving environment of the Davidson-Cornelius Day Care Center has earned Dr. Roberts' respect and affection. She has

been an integral part of the Day Care's fundraising and promotional success. Surely, Dr. Roberts will continue the vision and hope of the Davidson-Cornelius Day Care Center in the future.

## **The Road Ahead**

### **Chapter Eight**

"Our goal is to make sure that our children are allowed the time and the space to learn skills at ages 2, 3, and 4 to deal and cope with the world as they are going to be faced by it." - Mary Fox

Mrs. Mary Fox has witnessed many changes in the Davidson-Cornelius Day Care Center over the past 18 years as Director, but no change or outside pressure has altered the Center's mission statement or the commitment of the staff. The most obvious change in Mrs. Fox's 18-year involvement is the skyrocketing cost of operating the Center. As she explained, "We've always been licensed for 45 children, but [when we made the first budget] the highest fee anyone paid was \$35 per week. And now that is \$160, so [cost] certainly has changed."

It takes a great deal of money to keep the facilities up and running in accordance with current government regulations and to maintain a staff of 10. In earlier years, operating costs totaled about \$50,000. In comparison, today's budget exceeds \$300,000, which means that "to maintain our goal and our principles and our mission, we must raise a whole lot of money. We will provide care for children regardless of their parents' ability to pay. That has not changed. It just means more fundraisers, solicitations, grants, etc."

Mrs. Fox has also witnessed an evolution in parental attitude towards day care. The Center was started long before day care was an acceptable option for dual-career families. Later, when Mary Fox began working at the Center, people accepted day care, but generally as a babysitting agency. "[Parents] could drop [children] off and they would be safe and fed. None of the other stuff mattered."

Now, more than ever, day care is in high demand, and "parents have become a great deal more sophisticated as to what they want for their children." The highly sought after "educational-component" of day care has always been present at the Center. "It never was just a babysitting place," Mrs. Fox concludes, "because of our connection with people who understood the importance of education. Our board members, who were affiliated with the educational institution of Davidson College, thought more in terms of education than money. And that's been good."

Just as costs of operation are rising and parents' expectations of day care are increasing, so to are the rules and regulations governing day care operations. "There are lots of changes that come from the state, the county, I don't know . . . whoever decides that they are going to make a law that the day care centers have to operate under. [For example], the county will come in to do sanitation inspections and such and such has changed since last time. But I wasn't notified. How was I supposed to know?"

In order to address the problems of communication that exist within the day care sector, Mrs. Fox is currently organizing a coalition of day care workers to facilitate information exchange about government policies and regulations concerning day care. “That’s what I’m working on right now. But it’s a never-ending struggle. You’d like to stay one step ahead, but to be even would be good as well.”

## **Present Challenges**

The rapidly changing times bring about new challenges for the Center that it must continually address in order to protect its mission. Mrs. Fox is faced with difficult decisions daily. With only 45 spots available and a long waiting list, she often has to choose which side of the economic scale to choose. “I’ve always felt that if a mother decides that she wants a career and is set in her career, then she should not be penalized because she also chose to have children. On the other side of that coin, there is a single unwed mother who is barely making minimum wage and desperately needs day care for her children.”

So, Mrs. Fox’s balancing act requires vigilance of the mission statement: “With the economics of the county, we could fill all 45 seats we have available with children from high-income families without blinking an eye. And we could charge even more than we do at the high end. But, the challenge is to make sure that we [balance] the differing socio-economic levels [of our children.]”

Mrs. Fox and her staff also spend much time working to tailor the Day Care Center’s program to the current group of children, who face challenges and issues very different from the children of 18 years ago. Mrs. Fox recalls, “I had a child several years ago who built me a 9mm gun out of Lincoln Logs and showed me how to load it. He had seen this at home. These are not issues that you dealt with long ago.”

Flexibility is required to address these new challenges. The staff sees children who are extremely intelligent, yet who lack social skills and struggle on different levels. At times this is very frustrating. “I just feel inadequate sometimes,” admitted Mrs. Fox. But she and her staff work every day to give the structure, the grounding, and the love they need.

Mrs. Fox also worries that education in general is losing some of that “good common sense stuff” because of the importance placed on end-of-grade test results. Mrs. Fox believes that it is extremely important for young children to learn the basics – letters, shapes, and colors. However, she believes it is important for a child “to realize that the world is a large place.” This means realizing that “I’m not always going to get everything I want . . . and there are times that I will have to share and wait my turn.”

Mrs. Fox and her staff work to reassure parents that “children are like sponges and they’re going to learn in this environment . . . but, they’ve got to be children too.” From her experience in childcare, Mrs. Fox wonders if the tragic shootings in schools has its roots in the fact that society has “pushed children to be beyond their years.” The goal at the Davidson-Cornelius Day Care Center is to “make sure that young students are allowed the time and the space to learn skills at ages 2, 3, and 4 to deal and cope with the world as they are going to be faced by it.” It is a daunting task and at times Mrs. Fox “just want[s] to crawl under [her] desk.” “You know, these

children will be leaders of our nation one day . . . “ And so, it is the Center’s mission to give these children every opportunity to grow and develop that they can.

## **Looking to the Future**

As the Davidson-Cornelius Day Care Center approaches its 35<sup>th</sup> year of operation, some factors remain constant, like commitment to its mission statement and its need of community support to keep its doors open. While support for the Day Care Center is still very much alive, it is important to recognize the changing nature of the Davidson community.

Mrs. Fox is aware of the need to educate new people who move into the area about the Center’s worth, to help them see that “it has been here for many years and has served many, many children with the same goals in mind.” She recognizes that Davidson and the surrounding communities are no longer “those little bedroom communities, where you went to the grocery store and you knew everybody that you saw or you went to church and you knew everybody in the congregation.”

When asked if she believes a community “rededication” to the Center is necessary, Mrs. Fox hesitated and then reframed the question. “I would really like to see the community . . . and maybe rededicate is not the right word, be re-educated. You can ask people about the Davidson-Cornelius Day Care Center and they have no idea what you’re talking about. But then again there is a long list of supporters who so generously send a check year after year. But again, those folk are now starting to age out . . . Maybe it’s my old age, but I just realize how . . . fragile this all is and that we need to preserve it somehow.”

Mrs. Fox finally settled on “re-education” as the focus when beginning to target another group of supporters for the Davidson-Cornelius Day Care Center. She is looking forward to a large 35<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration in 2004, in which she hopes to reconnect many of the people who were instrumental in the Center’s past and present in order to celebrate the Day Care Center’s success and future. “This is a piece of Davidson history . . . a piece of Davidson history that has benefited the community in many, many ways.”

## **Spotlight**

### **Mary Fox Remembers . . .**

No one consistently gives more of her time, her love, or her self to the Day Care Center than Mrs. Mary Fox. For 18 years as director, Mrs. Fox has arrived at the Center at 6 am to open the doors and to greet her staff and students, and often she stays until 6 pm when the last children leave. She is a lady in high demand: her office is abuzz with phone calls, visitors, and young children stopping in to say hello. She always has time to greet each one by name.

Mrs. Fox is thankful that the Day Care Center is small enough to form close relationships with the families of her students. “That’s one of the beautiful things about the Center. There are 45 families with us. And at any given time I know those families and children.”

Her close relationships with families allow her to help families in times of need. There are many instances when parents come in and Mrs. Fox knows that something is wrong. “Maybe they

are embarrassed to say, 'I can't pay this week.' Or they are worried about work." Mrs. Fox enjoys flexibility in her job that very few directors have. She has the flexibility to help her families make ends meet in order to keep their children in day care because the Center is "not tied to the bottom line," but rather tied to make its mission statement real through service to the community.

"A while ago I had a family with two children here. And they were really struggling." In this instance, Mrs. Fox was able to help the mother through the process of applying for a Habitat house of her own. On the day of dedication of the new home, with tears in her eyes, the mother gave Mrs. Fox the credit for being able to move into her new home with her children.

Mrs. Fox is not only director of the Day Care's program, but also a central figure in a strong network of support that the Day Care Center provides to the families of its children. Mrs. Fox sees helping families in need as her side mission in life. And for years she's said, "When I quit doing this with my heart and start doing it with my head . . . then it's time for me to do something else."