

FREE! TAKE ONE WITH YOU!

RUN:
Nearly 300 come out to take part in third annual Beacon of Hope 5K. A15

HABITAT:
The ribbons are cut on two new affordable homes in Riverside. R1

MUSIC MAKERS:
Hamptons JazzFest gears up for a summer of concerts on the East End. B1

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Kids using "binoculars" at the Eleanor Whitmore Early Childhood Center. Below, children learning in the EWEC's garden.

PHOTOS COURTESY EWEC

PARTNERSHIPS BENEFIT LOCAL KIDS

Center will celebrate at Sunday event

BY HOPE HAMILTON

The Eleanor Whitmore Early Childhood Center in East Hampton will celebrate the unique and essential partnerships it has with several nonprofit groups that help the organization thrive at a benefit next week.

The benefit, "It Takes a Village," will be held at Mulford Farm on Sunday, June 29, from 5:30 to 8 p.m.

The funds raised will go directly toward helping to keep the center's fees, which are already among the lowest in Suffolk County, affordable for families, according to Joan Overlook, the

director of development for the center. The center has served the East End by providing child care and early education services to working families for over 50 years.

"We are very much an all-day child care and high-quality early childhood education center," Overlook said.

It is open five days a week from 7:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. and serves over 100 children ranging in age from 18 months to 4 years old. In addition to educational support, kids receive two meals and two snacks during the day.

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Dog Park Debate Gets Rabid

A call for civility falls on deaf ears

BY CHRISTOPHER WALSH

During a discussion of the Springs Park, popularly known as the Springs Dog Park, at a Springs Citizens Advisory Committee meeting on Tuesday, Councilman Ian Calder-Piedmonte offered members of the committee some advice: "The important thing is to look at what is being proposed, think about what you want to happen, and talk about it civilly."

Many of the few dozen residents attending may not have heard the last word. Regardless, some did not heed the recommendation — as a debate over proposed changes to the park quickly descended into attendees talking over one another, jeering, shouting and rolling their eyes.

Earlier this month, the Springs Park Committee, to which Calder-Piedmonte was appointed as liaison following his appointment to the Town Board in January, issued a report and recommendations to the board that includes removal of invasive shrubs and trees to create more open grassland areas. This, the report says, will both improve visibility for dog owners to supervise their pets and enhance habitat diversity.

"Since there are already shaded areas within the park, primarily provided by mature oak trees, which are native, the need to keep shaded areas is minimal in our opinion," according to the report. "Even with the removal of autumn olive and black locust, shade will still persist," it adds.

Another recommendation is establishment of a protected area for smaller dogs, dogs with disabilities, and people concerned about being knocked to

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BENEFIT: *Event Recognizes Center's Partners*

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"We're here for working families — we understand the necessity," Overlook said.

The center provides a nationally recognized curriculum that is sanctioned and approved by the National Association of Education for Young Children. After their time at the center, most kids go to prekindergarten or kindergarten, and the center has a private pre-K option available.

The center takes pride, Overlook said, in the enhanced programming that it offers to the children, and that programming wouldn't be possible without the support it receives from its partners, including Amber Waves Farm, the East Hampton Village Library, Springs Food Pantry, the Garden Club, the Ladies Village Improvement Society and Paddlers for Humanity.

Each nonprofit that the center works with provides local support in its own way.

"These organizations are critical to support the backbone of the Hamptons. To keep the quality of life to the standard that makes it such a special place," Overlook explained. "We do work together. I think a lot of people aren't aware of that. That's what we're celebrating."

Amber Waves Farm provides the garden plans, plants and initial planting of the "Kind-er-garden," an outdoor classroom and learning space.

"We wanted to make sure that we had an aspect of the curriculum that was grounded in a sense of place, because we live in such a special place," Overlook explained. "There is such an incred-

ible heritage of farming out here."

This garden is also connected to the partnerships with the Garden Club of East Hampton, which funds much of the garden education curriculum by purchasing plants from Amber Waves, and the LVIS, which funds the education program with teachers from Amber Waves Farm and places an emphasis on stewardship by connecting kids to the land and nature.

Springs Food Pantry is the guiding partner for the center's food pantry, which was started during the pandemic. The pantry feeds over 45 families weekly. This pantry could not have been sustained without the help of Springs Food Pantry, which purchases and packs grocery items with its volume discount that are then picked up for the center.

"Springs Food Pantry has been invaluable," Overlook said. "When we started our food pantry, we had no idea about how to run the business. We knew that people were hungry. Springs Food Pantry guided us along the way. It's a partner that has helped us help our families," she added.

The East Hampton Library partners via a program called "Book-Time," which is a weekly read aloud session, after which kids take home a book to read. Each child in the program also receives a library card. "They have been wonderful partners," Overlook said.

Paddlers for Humanity funded the Super Soccer Stars program, which enables every child at the center from age 18 months to 4 years old to participate in a weekly initiative year-round for free. It raises funds by having an 18-mile

open ocean paddle from Montauk to Block Island. With the funds raised, the center has been able to hire a school psychologist, among other forms of mental health support.

"I don't think there could be an organization like this anywhere but here," Overlook explained. "They have been very, very supportive and very good to us over the years."

According to Overlook, the cost of child care on average now exceeds the cost of a monthly mortgage payment. Overlook added that Suffolk County is considered a "child care desert," an evaluation based on the number of centers in relation to the population of young children.

"We work so hard to keep our fees affordable," Overlook explained. "There is a child care crisis in this country, and there is no lack of need, just a lack of services. Affordable child care is a critical issue for families."

The center opened in 1969, originally as a HeadStart Program of East Hampton. In 1976, the name changed to the East Hampton Daycare Center due to the closure of HeadStart programs north of Riverhead.

Nine years later, Eleanor Whitmore, a local philanthropist from Amagansett, joined the board of directors. When Whitmore came on, the focus shifted to early learning as well as day care.

There are eight lead teachers at the center, all of whom are certified early learning specialists. All of the assistant teachers are trained and certified as well. Classes are separated by age so that activities are aligned with where the children are develop-



Children at the center learn while having fun. Below, a child waters plants in the center's garden. PHOTOS COURTESY EWEECC

mentally. In every classroom, there is a Spanish-speaking adult alongside each teacher.

"I can't say enough about the staff," Overlook said. "They are so kind and so wonderful with the children."

Next week's event will feature live music, catering, cocktails and more, will commemorate the nonprofits, and present the inaugural Eleanor Whitmore Award, given to an individual or business that exemplifies the spirit of Whitmore by making a positive impact on children and supporting working families.

This year's recipient is Joe Gurra, the owner of Citarella.

Citarella partners with the East End Fund for Children, which supports over 3,500 children annually, by enhancing the capacities and programming of seven nonprofits in the area: the Bridgehampton Childcare & Recreation Center, The Children's Museum of the East End, the Eleanor Whitmore Early Childhood Center,



i-tri, Project MOST, The Retreat and the Southampton Youth Association. The Citarella team has been involved with the coalition for four years.

"We have gotten to know the culture of Citarella, and we are so impressed," Overlook said. "Every way we looked, all 360 degrees, Joe was the perfect candidate for this prize. We are pleased and honored he has agreed to accept."

The award will be introduced by Mariah Whitmore, Eleanor Whit-

more's granddaughter, and presented by East Hampton Village Mayor Jerry Larsen.

"We are very lucky in that we have business and community support," Overlook explained. "All of our partners are really engaged in a meaningful way. We couldn't do what we do without them. Hence our theme, it takes our village. It really does."

Tickets to the event start at \$150. For more information and to purchase tickets, visit eweecc.org.