

Issue for the week of 9/8/2004

## New CDCH School Opens Friday

By Kathryn Georgette

The Child Development Center of the Hamptons is set to open its new permanent facility on Stephen Hands Path in East Hampton. The CDCH Charter School will open this Friday with a special celebration to be held from 1 to 3 p.m. The celebration is open for all to attend, with cross community support coming in the form of celebrated guests expected to attend, including Governor George Pataki, Senator Kenneth P. LaValle, Congressman Timothy Bishop, East Hampton Town Supervisor Bill McGintee, Suffolk County Legislator Jay Schneiderman, and Alec Baldwin.

The afternoon event will also feature local musician Nancy Atlas performing the National Anthem and the burial of a time capsule, which in addition to memorabilia commemorating current news events, will also hold an application to CDCH, a special letter from Governor Pataki, and numerous items created and donated by CDCH students.

The addition of this new facility for CDCH is “a wonderful experience” for Dawn Zimmerman-Hummel, who founded the CDCH pre-school in 1997 after BOCES closed their pre-school program for children with special needs.

“The mission of the Child Development Center of the Hamptons is to provide educational and therapeutic services to children with disabilities on the East End of Long Island,” reads the CDCH Mission Statement. “We believe all children have the right to receive these basic services close to home.”

Zimmerman-Hummel became interested in an integrated school, educating both children with special needs, as well as the average student, in a large part because of her own experience as the mother of an autistic child.

“When I moved here from Los Angeles, all the children who required special education were sent to BOCES in Westhampton,” remembered Zimmerman-Hummel. “I felt my son would be too far away, too removed from the community.”

And so CDCH was born, although her son Jon, now 14, due to the time constraints of the start up of such a project, was too old to attend the pre-school. Jon has instead flourished in the Amagansett Elementary School and East Hampton Middle School. He will attend East Hampton High School this fall.

The success of the CDCH preschool, which in 1997 educated 14 children, and now has 110 students registered for the 2004/2005 school year, led to the development of the charter school in January 2000, which was the first charter school in Suffolk County and is New York State’s model for an integrated classroom setting.

“What is so unique about CDCH is that it is an integrated program that focuses on Special Ed and Regular Ed students learning side by side,” said Zimmerman-Hummel. “It’s so incredible. Kids are teaching kids.”

CDCH offers education for children from birth to five years old at the preschool, and kindergarten to seventh grades at the charter school. An additional grade will be added each year, with the end goal being a kindergarten through 12th grade alternative for students growing up on the East End. The new space is located on 10.2 acres of land, donated by the Town of East Hampton. A second building for the CDCH pre-school and a third building for a Life Skills High School are also in the planning phases.

The school is dependent largely on private donations to The CDCH Foundation for Special Children, the not-for-profit established to support the CDCH schools and activities. The foundation hosts many popular fundraisers, including The Orchid Ball and the Kite Dance, which celebrated its fifth year this March. Private donations have been received from many local supporters on the East End, as well as noted celebrities like Kathleen Turner and Jimmy Buffet. In the end, however, it isn’t the celebrity that brings donors to foundation events; it’s the children.

The CDCH Charter School is now located 110 Stephen Hands Path in East Hampton. For more information on the opening celebration this Friday, or on CDCH, call 267-0133 or visit [www.cdch.org](http://www.cdch.org).