



World Schools make a difference for students, community

What began as filling a need for day care has led to a life-shaping institution

NOT YOUR TYPICAL BUSINESS

By Tracie Stone

When The World Schools began 25 years ago, its backdrop, the remnants of a small empty chicken farm on the Daniel Webster Highway in Nashua, was barely large enough for five staff members and the 38 preschoolers being cared for. Since that time, founder and Executive Director Kathleen Nelson has relocated her facility, expanded programming and forged a place for her school in the hearts of the families she serves, the staff she supports and the community she calls home.

Her commitment to the children of The World Schools, the 62 staff members who now share her vision and the community of Nashua has earned Kathleen Nelson and The World Schools the honor of being named this month's winner of Citizens Bank's Not Your Typical Business Award.

A nurturing, progressive school committed to families, staff and community

"Kathy and her wonderful staff at The World Schools have made a real difference in educating and caring for the children of greater Nashua for over 25 years," said Joe Carelli, senior vice president and director of commercial banking for Citizens Bank. "Her commitment to families, staff and community is evident in many ways, from the nurturing, progressive educational environment at the school to the countless hours of local outreach that Kathy so tirelessly bestows."

Originally a high school teacher from the Washington, D.C., area, Nelson saw a need for quality day care in the southern region of the state when she and her husband Gary moved here over a quarter century ago.

Originally filling the need for day care in the 3-to-5-year-old age bracket, it wasn't long before Nelson realized the apparent demand not just for quality day care, but for educational alternatives. Out of this realization the three entities of The World

Schools eventually emerged.

Today World Elementary, Small World Country Day School and World Wizards Summer Camp now exist side by side in a 22,000-square-foot facility on Spit Brook Road. Murals grace the entry hall. Classrooms are flanked by rooms dedicated to art, music, technology and fun. The school grounds boast three age-appropriate playgrounds, two pools, nature trails and campsites.

The facility is open from 6:30 a.m. to 6 p.m. and offers comprehensive programs tailored to the needs of each individual child, whether infant or 6th-grader. Before- and after-school care bookend the accredited early childhood and elementary school programs. Dance, karate and foreign languages are all offered after school to address the needs of today's busy families.

Nelson retains the services of a special services director who is always available to address any concerns that arise among children or family, whether they are academic, social or behavioral.

"Whenever we see an issue or one is brought to our attention by a parent we get together immediately to develop a plan and put it into action the next day," said Nelson, the mother of a 16-year-old son. "The best way for us to support our children is to support our families," said Nelson.

Leading by example

While all of these things are important to Jody Little and her family, it is the ethnic diversity and tolerance — and acceptance that is nurtured because of it — at The World Schools that stand out the most.

The school, she said, "embraces and incorporates diversity into the learning experience."

Nelson and her staff are hopeful this early exposure to different cultures will play an important part in the lives of the children who attend The World Schools. Nelson sees this in and of itself as a contribution to the communities these children will some day call home.

In fact, at The World Schools, waiting until adulthood to begin making community contributions is not an option.

Even during the tender preschool years the



Kathleen Nelson and her World Schools 'have made a real difference in educating and caring for the children of greater Nashua,' says banker Joe Carelli. (Photo by Jodie Andruskevich)

school's students are actively putting smiles on the faces of area residents. On Earth Day, local residents were treated to songs sung by The World School students. Each month the school sponsors a dinner for the Ash Street Shelter and all take part in the annual Salvation Army Angel Tree Holiday Project. Students recently held a drive to collect items needed by survivors of last December's tsunami in the Indian Ocean.

Hoping to lead by example, Nelson and the staff also are active locally, opening their school to local Boy Scout troops and inviting firefighters to use their pools for water safety training. Parenting and child-care workshops also are offered through the school.

A member of the National Childcare Association and the Nashua Early Childcare and Education Network, Nelson also has been made a Paul Harris Fellow through her longtime involvement with the Rotary Club of Nashua West.

Nelson shows the same sense of commitment to The World Schools' staff, more than half of whom have been at the school for more than 10 years.

"People stay here because they love it. They love the kids and they know their ideas are respected and

will be listened to," Nelson said, adding, "We have great respect for each other."

A sense of freedom has kept Danielle Rieth, teacher and department head for 3-year-olds, at The World Schools for 15 years.

"The teachers here have the freedom to bring their own personalities into the classrooms — that's so important," Rieth said.

While numerous commitments appear to top Nelson's list of priorities, one belief that drives her is clearly captured in the single sentence etched along the entrance hall: "Through these doors walk the greatest kids in the world."

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