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LEEWARD People



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SEPT. 10-16, 2008

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On the same page

Jed Gaines, founder of Read Aloud America, explains the importance of reading to the throng at Waimalu Elementary during the kickoff of this year's book-loving program.

See page 11



Enterprising mother opens Aiea preschool

BY CHRIS AGUINALDO
Staff Writer

AIEA — When Cheryl Cudiamat awoke on June 3, she had no idea she'd soon be on the path to opening a preschool. That night, she and other parents would learn that St. Timothy's Children's Center in Aiea, founded in 1977, was abruptly shutting its doors.

"There was no explanation with the closure," said the Aiea mom, whose son Tyson was going to be enrolled at St. Timothy's in the upcoming school year. "All of us — parents and teachers — were just shocked."

That disbelief was quickly replaced by the urgency to find new educational arrangements for 80 youngsters. As other parents scrambled to find openings at other preschools, MBA-armed Cudiamat formulated her own solution: founding the Keiki Care Center of Hawaii.

Cudiamat and husband Jeffrey, who owns the Structural Hawaii Inc. design firm, knew that to start a business, "you need a facility. It took a month to find this place," she said of the



Chris Aguinaldo photo

Cheryl Cudiamat, owner of the new Keiki Care Center of Hawaii, gives a hug to son Tyson while visiting his classroom.

Wayland Baptist University campus on Kauhale Street, near the Aiea Post Office. The Keiki

Care Center opened on Aug. 18, thanks to the opportune arrangement. SEE PRESCHOOL PAGE 4

He means business

City Prosecutor Peter Carlisle addresses a joint gathering of two business groups. See Faces on page 2



No growing pains here

Experts will be at the Urban Garden Center in Pearl City this Saturday. See This Week item on page 10



Lori Onaga

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Preschool: St. Timothy teachers retained

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

ment of the university using the facility at night for classes, and the preschool subleasing the property in the day.

The keiki facility rents half of the space or eight classrooms in the 76,000-square-foot building, and has nine employees on staff, including six teachers retained from St. Timothy's and two aides. There are 20 students enrolled, with openings for kids ages 2-4.

School furnishings cost the Cudiamats about \$20,000, and they're building an indoor 600-square-foot indoor playground for about \$50,000. It's a sizable personal investment that is money well spent, said Cudiamat.

"We opened as a corporation to get the school up and running for the children, parents and teachers," she said. "Our long-term plan is to become a non-profit," but the process is quite involved, she explained.

Cudiamat speaks calmly about the decision to put so much personal money into the project, because she truly believes she is motivated by the right ideals.

"We felt we could do this," said Cudiamat. "Honestly, making money isn't our focus."

She said she knew starting the Keiki Care Center was the right thing to do, because of the top-notch caliber of St. Timothy's educational personnel.

"My oldest son, Carson, just finished his first year there and Tyson was going to have the same teachers," Cudiamat said.

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"If there's anyone I trust taking care of my children, it's these teachers."

And that's exactly why the staff is more strongly involved in running the new center than at St. Timothy's, notes Cudiamat. While she does make most of the major operational decisions, it's the teachers who take the lead when it comes to educational direction, she said.

Excited about that change is center director Lori Onaga, who worked at St. Timothy's for 29 years. "It's less political and more pleasant," affirms Onaga, who admits that the last year at the old school was "stressful."

She believes that part of the

blame for the former school's abrupt closure was administrative leadership that was not open to teacher viewpoints.

"We didn't have a chance, because no one was listening to us," said Onaga. "But Cheryl believed in the teachers and the program. I feel forever grateful that she's given us the opportunity to do this job that we enjoy."

Onaga also expressed appreciation for the parents who have signed up their children at the fledgling Keiki Care Center.

Among them is Sherie Tanaka of Aiea, whose 3-year-old daughter, Darcie, is a new enrollee. Tanaka said she originally wanted Darcie in St. Timothy's because of its outstanding reputation and location convenience, but went elsewhere after the closure.

Then came Keiki Care Center.

"We pulled her out of the other school when we learned this place was opening," Tanaka said. "We want her to have these teachers with their credentials and experience. Darcie said to me, 'I have the best teachers and school.'"

For more information, call 387-5602 or go online to www.keikicarehawaii.com.



Chris Aguinaldo photo

Sherie Tanaka walks out with her 3-year-old daughter, Darcie, after a day at the Keiki Care Center of Hawaii in Aiea. The new preschool is staffed by former St. Timothy's Children's Center employees.



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