

Exciting time for early childhood education in Sheridan

What an exciting time for early childhood education in Sheridan!

Through our citizens' and businesses' participation with Forward Sheridan's Economic Development Strategic Plan, child-care shortage was identified as one of the top 10 economic development challenges to be addressed in the next three years.

Throughout summer and into the fall many people across Sheridan forged a collaborative team to focus on building a learning community which could inspire new and veteran teachers and serve families in need of child care.

The Whitney Foundation, Sheridan College, the city of Sheridan, and Forward Sheridan worked diligently to come up with a solution in the fall of 2006.

With the assistance of the business community and elected officials, the city of Sheridan was awarded \$1.5 million for the initial construction of a child-care center, with another \$1.5 million that will be requested for phase two of the project.

The work continues, with the collaborations and relationships expanding every day. That much you may have already known.

What you may not have known is that as the temperatures fall and snow dusts our horizon, exciting new developments are emerging with Hand-In-Hand, the Sheridan Early Childhood Education Center.

In the coming months building plans will begin to take shape when the as-yet-to-be-named architects come on board and breathe life into the visions that have been dancing around our heads.

With newly formed vision and goal statements articulating the community-support, child-care, and teacher-education spirit and purpose of the center, the vision is starting to come into concrete focus.

The foundational beliefs driving philosophy and practice value children as competent and curious, encourage teachers to find inspiration and joy in teaching, and engage families and community in meaningful relationships and lifelong learning.

As the design of the physical space takes shape on paper, many voices from throughout the community are contributing to the process in many ways. Excitement is growing, fueled by the supportive partnerships of a community actively investing in its own vital future.

In step with the goals and progress of Hand-In-Hand, Sheridan College has rolled out the first of three early childhood teacher-education and credential programs.

A Community Affair

Lissanna
Follari

Planning for Sheridan's economic development



The Early Childhood Education Certificate is designed to provide course work on best practices and new trends in the education of young children paired with hands-on experiences applying new strategies and techniques.

This fall marks the first official class of students in the program, many supported by the new WY Quality Counts! state scholarship program from the Department of Workforce Services.

Soon there will also be two new associate degree options in Early Childhood Education to provide pathways to transfer and to achieve a higher degree of professional preparation.

All of these programs will provide professional development opportunities for current early childhood professionals as well as attract and prepare new teachers.

The college is dedicated to guiding and supporting new and existing teachers as part of the ongoing efforts we all share in realizing the dream of a healthy, vibrant future for Sheridan.

But still much more developments have been brewing in the early childhood community in Sheridan this fall!

The Sheridan Early Childhood Association, a partnership of child-care providers, Department of Family Services licensing agents, the Sheridan College Department of Education, and the Center for a Vital Community, has also reconvened.

Supporting and promoting high-quality practice and cooperation among professionals, SECA is shaping up to become a source of leadership and advocacy for early childhood professionals, children, and families in Sheridan and across the state.

Monthly meetings focus on providing technical assistance to providers, promoting awareness of legislative issues and changes, and events for fun and professional growth.

Most of all, SECA provides a collegial gathering of professionals committed to Sheridan families and children.

Indeed! What an exciting time for early childhood education in Sheridan and what a hopeful vision for our future is taking shape!

Dr. Lissanna Follari is education faculty and department coordinator at Sheridan College.

"A Community Affair" is a weekly column from citizens who support Forward Sheridan, a professional business organization of invested partners whose purpose is to develop and maintain a sound economy in Sheridan County. Philippe Chino is president/CEO of Forward Sheridan.