

Child-care center reaches quarter-century mark

By S. Clayton Moore

Contributing Writer

A Child's Touch, one of the largest day-care centers in Thornton, will celebrate 25 years of caring for children on Aug. 1.

The staff has invited all former students to help them celebrate from 4 to 7 p.m. There will be a disc jockey and lots of kid-friendly activities as well as snacks and giveaways.

"It doesn't seem like that long," said Mike Grillo, who owns the state-licensed, nonprofit Christian school, along with his wife, Debi. "It's still exciting, and it's still fun."

The center was started in 1977 at a location near Water World in Federal Heights and moved to its home on two acres in Thornton in 1989.

"It's a beautiful facility," said Reta Ott, assistant director, who has been with the company for 17 years. "Mike and Debi went before the city and presented the plan when we first started, and we're pretty close to having everything completed that we wanted to have done when we began."

Although the center initially faced opposition from neighbors, it has since become an important part of the community.

It serves an average of 230 students and employs nearly 50 staff members, including nine men, who find themselves an anomaly in the field. Children range from one-year-olds to full-time kindergarten students as well as students up to 12 years old in before- and after-school programs.

In addition to its primary facility, a former church containing several classrooms and a full-time kitchen, A Child's Touch also houses several themed outbuildings with hands-on exhibits inspired by the Denver's Children's Museum, including an inventor's lab and a water-misted marina play area.

"I think I hold the record for the number of barns in Thornton," laughs Grillo, who has taken personal responsibility for much of the center's construction.

If you go

**A Child's Touch
Christian Day Care
9141 Poze Blvd.,
Thornton**

All former students are invited to the 25th anniversary celebration, 4 to 7 p.m., Thursday, Aug. 1.

For more information, call 303-286-8460 or visit www.achildstouch.com.



S. Clayton Moore/METRONORTH NEWS

Mike Grillo has owned A Child's Touch with his wife, Debi, for 25 years.



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Children at A Child's Touch cool off in the water-based exhibits in the marina.

"Mike is constantly adding and changing things," said Ott. "It's not like the kids are going to the same old room every day. Everything is always new and changing and being improved."

Security measures at the center include closed-circuit cameras and doors with combination locks.

Future building plans, already approved by the city, include adding a gymnasium and theater space.

Ott says that it's people that

make the difference.

"I think the first thing that makes our school unique is our staff," said Ott, who noted that the average staff member has been with the center seven years, a phenomenal amount of time in the child care industry.

"You can have a beautiful facility, and I think we have one that is second to none, but a building doesn't teach the kids," he said. "It doesn't make them cared for and happy. We invest a lot in the staff because they are so valuable."

"Our teachers are encouraged to be innovative in their techniques and to make learning fun," said Grillo. "We're trying to make an impact on these children so it's going to stay with them years down the line. We're giving experiences to these children that they're going to carry with them."

"That's what makes it worthwhile," said Grillo. "It's where you get your strokes as an educator."