

Day care adjusts to parents' needs ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

It's 8:30 on a brilliant September morning, the kind of day farmers need to get the crop off.

Garry Duncan is delivering son Thomas, who is almost three, to a sun-filled bright new building tucked behind the calm residential streets of this central Manitoba town.

The Duncans rely on the Miami Children's Facility Inc. for child care during seeding and harvest, when Garry is busy in the fields or with his crop spraying business, and wife Louise is teaching school.

The centre is geared to work around parents' busy schedules, said director Donna Riddell.

Riddell first saw the need for a day care in Miami in 1997. She drove 30 minutes to work in Carman every day, and didn't like taking her children so far on icy winter roads.

So Riddell and other parents surveyed people in the community to find out more about their child care needs. They found farm families wanted help in the busy seasons.

Others wanted flexible hours and a nursery school.

They started working on the project in October 1997, and opened for business two and a half years later.

Their biggest challenge was finding a place to run the day care. They looked at public places in town, like the community hall, but they couldn't find one that was smoke-free.

They looked at homes, but couldn't find one that met fire codes and space requirements.

So they built a new 204 sq. metre split-level building within walking distance of the town's school for \$118,000.

Half the money came from provincial and municipal grants, and private donations. The other half was mortgaged. The group is using a job training program for local residents, and employs four full-time and two part-time staff.

Riddell said the centre gives kids a chance to socialize with their peers before starting school in the community.

The centre is also a member of Farm Safety 4 Just Kids, and held a farm safety carnival in the spring.

Dropping off her four-year-old twins Colin and Riley, Allison Abbott-Wiebe said she appreciates the longer-than-normal hours and flexible scheduling at the day care.

"I can't say enough about it. It's been a lifesaver for me, for sure," said Abbott-Wiebe.

Her husband just got out of farming and now works long hours driving a tractor-trailer. She said staff are easy-going, happy and caring.

"I listen to them working with the kids and they're so patient. It's a wonderful place."

- reprinted from the Western Producer

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