

## Finding brighter horizons

By Chrissie Long

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Staff photo by Ellen Bullock Bright Horizons teacher Sue Phillips laughs as George Powell, 18 months, makes a mess in the toddler room at the new Boxborough childcare facility. (Ellen Bullock/Staff photographer)

The Bright Horizons daycare center in Boxborough was made to fit.

With knee-high sinks and shin-level toilets, the newly constructed facility is a haven for children under 5. Not only are the amenities perfected to be within arms reach of young kids, but the tables, the wall-hangings, and shelving are all sized for 4-year-olds.

But the daycare center on Codman Hill Road also fits the needs of the town. With several large area employers and Interstate 495 serving thousands of commuters, a center seemed to supply a prevalent demand.

"We decided to open the center in Boxborough because we saw a growing need for childcare to support working families," said Illene Serpa, vice president of communications for Bright Horizons. "It was our feeling that by opening a center there, we could serve working families in the area and help meet a need for more high-quality childcare."

Bright Horizons operates close to 600 facilities nationwide and abroad. Partnering with corporate sponsors, the company provides a standard curriculum to all enrolled students. Headquartered in Watertown, the closest facilities to Boxborough are in Sudbury, Marlborough and Lexington.

The Boxborough center opened Nov. 13, with a Grand Opening ribbon-cutting ceremony held Jan. 20. The building was built to house 108 children between the ages of one month and 5 years.

With only 16 students there, the center was silent on a Thursday morning visit. You wouldn't suspect that children played between the building blocks and book shelves.

But in the baby room, two women bounced infants on their laps. Children used potatoes as stamps as they made paintings in the toddler room. And in the preschool room, three students were cleaning up and preparing for story time.

"Just look around," said Julie Barlow, director of the new facility. "The building is homey, warm and comfy. The facility helps students feel that they are in a home away from home."

Each classroom is equipped with its own outside play yard, fenced in to prevent wandering children. And while every room is not yet being used, each class is stocked with the latest trucks, dolls and books.

Standing next to a tub of paper shavings that teachers call as the sensory table, one child showered himself in shredded paper, crying in glee. His hands were stained blue from the last art project.

"We do all the messy stuff here so that parents don't have to at home," Barlow said, as the paper fell to the floor.

Barlow, a Maynard resident, has worked in day care facilities in the area for the past 25 years. She came to the Boxborough Bright Horizon center because she was impressed with the facility and because she was attracted to the company's philosophy.

"This is one of the best companies I have ever worked for," she said. "They really put an emphasis on the families and communication with the families."

To bridge the gap between working parents and their children, Barlow sends digital pictures to mothers and fathers while they are at work. Teachers at the school keep journals of the students' days. Parents also keep in touch with students' progress through frequent meetings with the teachers.

Renee Capachione, mother of three children, used a different center for 12 years. But when that child care facility underwent management changes, she and her husband decided to try something new.

"Not only is it a beautiful center aesthetically, but it is also managed well, with so much consistency," she said. "When I walk in here, I sense a calming environment and that projects onto the children. My daughter absolutely thrives here."

Capachione, an Acton resident, drops off her 18 month-old daughter Georgia between three and five days a week. Although Georgia is still in her first month, Capachione says she is happy at the new center.

"I was very impressed with how bright and cheerful the place was," said Selectmen Les Fox, who cut the ribbon on the daycare's grand opening. "It seemed like a nice addition to the town both as a neighbor and as a business. I am pleased we can offer this service to Boxborough residents and to surrounding towns."