

The Community Connection

Pottstown celebrates young children

Published: Wednesday, May 04, 2011

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Connection photos by Mike Erickson: Brianna Long, 18 months, checks out the calf checking her out during the Pottstown Celebrates Young Children event.

Billy goats, bunnies, clowns, games and lots of children crowded the grounds of the Pottstown YMCA for the 5th annual “Pottstown Celebrates Young Children” celebration, hosted by PEAK.

PEAK – Pottstown Early Action for Kindergarten Readiness – has held the event at the Pottstown Y for the past five years and the celebration keeps growing.

“This is the biggest crowd I’ve seen yet!” said Mary Rieck, PEAK coordinator. “I’m very happy that we have been able to put this day together for Pottstown area children and their families to come in and celebrate not only being a child, but providing families all kinds of useful information about programs and services.”

In 2006, a collaboration that included Pottstown School District, community childcare providers and area funders began discussions related to improving the readiness of children entering kindergarten. Working together during a year-long planning process, the collaboration created the outline for the Pottstown Early Action for Kindergarten Readiness (PEAK) initiative with the ultimate goal of ensuring that every child in Pottstown has access to early childhood learning opportunities that prepare them to be successful in kindergarten.

Beginning with the original five community partner sites which had 13 classes serving 204 three and four year old children, PEAK started implementing the key strategy areas of community outreach, family engagement, quality improvement, health/wellness and kindergarten transition. With a goal of impacting all young children and families in the community, PEAK reached out to other settings serving children in the subsequent years. In 2007-2008, PEAK expanded from

working with five sites with 13 classrooms serving three and four year old children to working with 35 classrooms in 11 community sites. Significant funding resources were added to the PEAK initiative in 2007-2008 through Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts, Pottstown Area Health & Wellness Foundation, Montgomery County Foundation and the continued funding from Pre-K Counts Public-Private Partnership and United Way of Southeastern Pennsylvania. Since that time, funding has increased through the state-funded classrooms of Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts which now serve 123 community children in free full-day classrooms located at the community partner programs. New partners have been added by working with the TriCounty Area Chamber of Commerce to emphasize the importance of quality early education to the business community.

With a mission that all children entering kindergarten will be ready to learn and achieve, PEAK works to raise the quality of early education provided to all of the children in the community, whether in formal or informal settings and to provide support to the families to be the child-first teacher. PEAK continues to expand and deepen the impact of the initiative in the Pottstown to revitalize the community through a comprehensive early learning system.

But Sunday's event was all about having fun. Quiver Farms provided the animal petting zoo the lined the front lawn of the YMCA, a Pottstown area ambulance and fire truck crew were on hand to take children on a tour of the vehicles and inside the gym? Controlled chaos.

A moon bounce, face painting, games, soft pretzels and lots of information booths lined the perimeter of the gym while children and their families maneuvered their way from table to table.

“The PEAK program, as well as this event, would not be possible without our community ad managing partners,” said Mary. “The Pottstown School District, Montgomery County Head Start, Montgomery Early Learning Center, Pottstown Area Health & Wellness Foundation, Pottstown Family Center, Pottstown YMCA, United Way of Southeastern Pennsylvania and the YWCA Tri-County Area have all been instrumental in making the past five years a great success!

“And we look forward to many more years of celebrating Pottstown's children!”

For more information on PEAK, please visit www.peakonline.org.