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Submitted photo

Jim Boehm took over as executive director at Father Carr's Place2B earlier this year.

Father Carr's director refocuses shelter goals

By Cheryl Hentz
HERALD CONTRIBUTOR

If you've been around Oshkosh for any length of time, you are no doubt familiar with Father Carr's Place2B on the eastern frontage road of Interstate 41. Originally started in May 1974 by the Rev. Martin Carr in St. Peter's Catholic Church basement, and relocated to the 1900 block of North Main Street, Father Carr's has been on the city's west side for most of its nearly 50-year existence.

What started as a youth center – a safe, supervised place for teens to hang out, play games and be themselves – the Place2B eventually expanded to become a

homeless shelter. As the needs of residents and families grew, so did Carr's dream to fill those needs.

He eventually purchased more property and opened a free clinic, a dining facility where people could get a free meal three times a day and have fellowship with others, a chapel for weekly Mass, and a food bank.

Though Carr died on Father's Day in 2007 due to complications related to diabetes, his dream to serve the community lived on. With so many dedicated volunteers who shared Carr's devotion to help-

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Hospital, hotel plans advanced

Plan Commission backs riverfront medical center

By Kaitlyn Scoville
OSHKOSH HERALD

The Oshkosh Plan Commission paved the way for two development projects, including a new hospital with a partnership between ThedaCare and Froedtert Health and an additional hotel near Oshkosh Corp. headquarters.

At a previous commission workshop, group members discussed the 58,000-square-foot medical campus development at the former Morgan Door Co. site, situated on the northwest corner of 6th Avenue and Oregon Street.

The Morgan District is identified as a 36-acre blighted area that was previously set to become apartment buildings. After those plans fell through, ThedaCare and Froedtert came forward with intentions to build a third hospital in the city.

The project is expected to have emergency care and inpatient beds, including a retail pharmacy, three operating rooms and an onsite medical office for primary care and specialty needs. It is proposed to take up about 21 acres of the district.

The applicant has noted that the proposed location was chosen to deal with needs for urgent care within the core areas of Oshkosh. The new 24-hour hospital will provide local access to acute treatments, including emergency calls within the city's central district.

Staff and commissioners were supportive of the development as it aligns with the Imagine Oshkosh center city investment plan introduced by Houseal Lavigne in the 2010s.

Commissioner Kathy Propp noted her

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Acute child care needs spark education initiative

FVTC program seeks to answer demand

By Kaitlyn Scoville
OSHKOSH HERALD

The need for child care has resumed to pre-COVID referral request numbers. Parents who worked from home during COVID are now returning to the office. Parents tried watching their children while working from home in some cases because their child care program closed temporarily but have found that is no longer a suitable option.

Grandparents or other relatives who stepped in to help with child care during COVID are finding it to be too much work and are seeking child care for their grandchildren. As the children become toddlers and are more active, grandparents have a challenging time caring for them.

According to a Winnebago County Family Child Care survey from March, 65% of children up to 24 months old are on a waiting list for child care.

The survey, conducted by Fox Valley Child Care Resource and Referral (CCRR), also noted that 20% or more of Winnebago County residents have experienced four or more adverse childhood experiences, whereas the state average is 14%.

Eleven percent of Winnebago County's 170,000-person population are ages 0-9, according to Census Reporter, an independent organization unaffiliated with the U.S. Census Bureau that



Olson

SEE **Child care** ON PAGE 8



Photo from FVTC

FVTC's Early Childhood Education department will add an apprenticeship program starting next year.

Child care

FROM PAGE 1

helps the data be easier to use for Americans.

The stresses to find child care for parents of children of all ages has been attributed to a worker shortage occurring even before pandemic times, according to CCRR executive director Judy Olson.

“There were already staff shortages before but COVID (exacerbated) the problem,” she said.

CCRR was founded in 1987 as a not-for-profit organization with intentions to support families and child care providers through various modes, such as free child care referrals in eight counties, professional development and training, and business start-up services.

Kathy Meetz, Fox Valley Technical College (FVTC) early childhood education department chair, said the shortage of workers is due to limited wages and benefits for its employees. Olson said that in addition to this, child care centers are unable to afford higher pay for staff and higher-educated talent due to the costs of managing

such a business.

“Bottom line is that they can work for higher wages in almost any other field. Many have left the field due to burnout because the teachers who did remain are stretched so thin,” Olson said.

The domino effect of staff shortages – and the long waitlists – are causing parents to lack child care services that can allow them to work.

“Just think about the economy and all of the individuals who need to have child care in order to work,” said Meetz, who had been in the early childhood education industry for 30 years. “Children need to be cared for. It’s not just a problem with a family; child care is infrastructure. Some people understand that and some don’t.”

Meetz said not having these opportunities for children may lead to adverse situations.

“There’s no place for them to go and their parents still need to work,” she said. “What does that look like for them? Is it a hodgepodge of care arrangements? What kind of stress are they feeling, then, in their home environment? It’s not a problem that’s just isolated to the family unit – it’s a societal problem as it affects everybody regardless of whether they think it does or not.”

From birth to age 5, a child’s brain develops more than at any other time in life, making early learning critically important.

At birth, the average baby’s brain is about a quarter of the size of the adult brain. It doubles in size in the first years and once a child reaches age 3, 85% to 90% of their core brain structures have been formed.

“Children are born learning, and what they learn in those first few years can change the course of their lives,” Olson said. “Research demonstrates that high-quality early care and education is a crucial component of a child’s healthy development. High-quality child care makes a difference in the lives of young children, particularly those that are the most vulnerable.”

In a Wisconsin Public Radio article, Ruth Schmidt, executive director of the Wisconsin Early Childhood Association, said it’s likely that two-thirds of child care programs in the state are looking to hire full-time staff right now.

Olson said one way that early childhood educators could be better compensated is to increase public investments into local child care programs to offer livable wages and benefits to employees, “which, in return, will result in more child care slots available to families in the community.

“Improving compensation for early childhood educators would support a healthy, stable workforce so the early childhood professionals can do the most important work: care for and shape the minds of our youngest children.”

FVTC’s Early Childhood Education

department has been working to better accommodate students in its program, including the addition of an apprenticeship program that begins in January, and the option to complete the program completely online starting next fall.

The apprenticeship program is in direct partnership with the state Department of Workforce Development and child care centers in the district that can provide training for students. They come to FVTC for instruction – which is paid for – and continue to work for both credit and income.

Students are also able to complete their practicum at their place of employment to prevent workers from losing income while care centers retain the much-needed work.

“We’re constantly looking at ways we can support students and families. It’s mostly women that enroll in our program – though we have some fantastic men who have performed just as well – and they’re not taking classes full time,” Meetz said. “So many of them are balancing life. You can enter our program any semester, part time, in a multitude of modalities.”

But out of the entire struggle, Meetz said those who are passionate about helping children will get the job done.

“If people have any desire or goal that is to work with children, we can help them meet that,” she said. “We can help them get there in a much cheaper way. If you’re passionate about it, you’re going to make a difference.”

Questions regarding the Early Childhood Education program can be sent to kathy.meetz8829@fvtc.edu.



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