



## NEW HARRIS FAMILY CHILDREN'S CENTER OPENS

Once an hour, a large wall clock in the lobby of the new Harris Family Children's Center chimes lullabies for several minutes. And many afternoons, preschoolers gather round the clock and, with their best inside voices, ask it to play another tune so they can dance. With a little help from the center's director, Mary Driscoll, the clock obliges, and the children begin to twirl and spin—their dancing reflecting the joy and excitement felt by everyone at the Harris Family Children's Center.

"This state-of-the-art facility plays a tremendous role in what we are able to expose our children to at a very young age: appreciation of the arts and sciences, opportunities for exploration and experimentation, and a close connection to and respect for the environment," says Driscoll. "Like the Academy, our goal for our children is to ensure a love of learning and a life-long commitment to helping others."

Almost quadruple its former size, the new 8,000-square foot center opened on August 21 and can provide full-time care for 54 children, more than double its previous enrollment. It has cathedral ceilings; dozens of large, low windows; a full, participatory kitchen; an arts and science room, complete with a kid-friendly, adjustable Harkness table; a multipurpose room better known as the Great Room; and a screened porch with a hammock and plenty of comfortable seating. The building is divided in half, with a "home environment" for infants and toddlers on one side, and an academic side for preschoolers and kindergarteners to engage and explore in collaborative arts and science exercises on the other. The center is also home to the Academy's After-School Program (formerly housed in the Potting Shed behind Phillips Church), which provides activities for 20 K-5 children.

Exeter's first daycare center opened in 1988, thanks to the support of Principal Kendra Stearns O'Donnell and to the long-term efforts of the Committee to Enhance the Status of Women (CESW), a group of Exeter faculty and staff who recognized that an on-campus daycare center was essential to attracting qualified professional women. "We were the only daycare facility around that would take six-week-old babies," recalls Academy librarian Jacquelyn Thomas, a CESW leader. "We had babies and toddlers in the tiny apartment where we started. But we outgrew that place very



*Filled with natural light, ample space, and abundant opportunities for exploration and experimentation, the new Harris Family Children's Center makes children—and their parents—dance for joy. The 8,000-square-foot building is divided in half, with a "home environment" for infants and toddlers on one side, and an academic side for preschoolers and kindergarteners on the other. The center also offers after-school programs for grade-school-age children, who can make use of computer equipment donated by Douglas Wirth '56.*



*(Above) The Harris Family Children's Center was dedicated on September 8. On hand for the ribbon-cutting were many of those who helped make the building possible, including (from left) Assistant Principal Tom Hassan, Principal Ty Tingley, Rob Harris, Britt Harris, Susan Harris, Rebecca Harris, Trustee President Chuck Harris III '69, HFCC director Mary Driscoll, Grace Panetta, Trustee Nicie Johnson Panetta '84, project manager Michael Searle-Spratt.*



*Chuck Harris (center photo, third from left) was joined by son Rob, wife Susan, mother Rebecca and brother Britt at the dedication. The center's name reflects Harris' wish to honor his parents; Mrs. Harris was presented with flowers during the ceremony.*

quickly." The daycare center later relocated to larger quarters on Water Street, but by 2000, that facility was also proving too small to meet the needs of the Academy community.

The man behind the Harris Family Children's Center is Trustee President Chuck Harris III '69, who first became aware of the need for a new childcare center when he joined the Academy Life Task Force. "We were very fortunate to have an outstanding staff providing excellent care and education, but the old facility was inadequate in terms of size and functionality," Harris says. He saw the project as "central" to the Academy's vision of attracting the finest faculty and staff, and decided to lend his support. The center's name reflects his strong desire to honor his own parents. "They made a big sacrifice for me to travel 1,000 miles to Exeter," says the North Carolina native and former scholarship student. "I owe them a lot and felt naming the center would be a nice way to say something about that."

As for the completed center, Harris calls it "excellent beyond my imagination. The combination of abundant natural light, the features designed for the developmental needs of the children and the creativity of the staff is fantastic."

Harris' mother, brother, wife and son joined him at the center's dedication on September 8, where the children sang and presented Harris and his family with gifts. Harris, who had brought his guitar to the ceremony, serenaded the children with a rendition of James Taylor's "Sweet Baby James." "My mom hadn't been to Exeter since my graduation ceremony in 1969, and she had a wonderful time and was deeply honored," he says.