

New Carroll center 'a saving grace'



At left, Kelly Meiners, lead teacher, and Erin Williams, teacher, read to students in the older toddlers' classroom in the new Early Head Start Center in Carroll.

Below, Mackenzie Davis, one of the Early Head Start Center "floating" teachers, holds Leiana Williamson, daughter of Helena Harris.

LARRY DEVINE | TIMES HERALD

By LARRY DEVINE
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Tonya Weber began seeing the rewards soon after New Opportunities opened the doors of its first-ever Early Head Start Center in Carroll last month.

"One little one really struggled the first day, had a little bit of a hard time the second day, but by the third or fourth day, when he arrived, he held his arms out to the teacher," Weber recalled.

"Oh my gosh, that's what we're here looking for, that bond they start to develop as they become familiar with that caregiver."

Weber is Head Start/Early Head Start director who worked to secure a federal grant that brought New Opportunities' goal of opening the center to fruition.

New Opportunities opened the center in a building at 1617 E. 10th St., which was owned by Lenz Leasing Inc. and was occupied in the past by Midwest Seed, Channel Bio and most recently Bayer. The grant allowed New Opportunities to purchase the Carroll site as well as purchase and renovate a facility already in use for Early Head Start Center in Perry. The complete grant amount to start the centers in Carroll and Perry was \$2,461,169 — \$1,316,960 in Carroll and \$1,144,209 in Perry.

Heuton Construction built the 7,700-square-foot Carroll building in 2006 and was contractor again for remodel-

ing that included turning large, open, cubicle space into classrooms. The center now has four classrooms, five offices and two conference rooms on the main level. Downstairs there's a commercial kitchen, storage and a large room used both for kids' activities and staff training. An elevator also was installed.

"It's absolutely beautiful. The center has worked out amazingly," Weber said.

According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services website, "Early Head Start programs provide intensive comprehensive child development and family support services to low-income infants and toddlers and their families, and to pregnant women and their families."

New Opportunities has provided some services with home visitations, but the center-based Early Head Start is new. New Opportunities over the years has offered classroom Head Start for children 3 to 5.

The new Early Head Start center has capacity for 32 children, with classrooms divided by ages for children infants to 9 months, 9 months to 18 months, and toddlers. The center opened with nine children and currently has nearly 20 enrolled.

New Opportunities keeps a waiting list and always accepts applications. Contact New Opportunities at 712-792-9266.

"We have families move or make different decisions

about what they're doing. We're frequently filling in and pulling from that list," Weber said.

The center primarily will serve Carroll County-area families but also may accept children from surrounding counties whose families come to Carroll for work or school.

Priority is given to children from low-income families, but consideration also is given for special circumstances, such as families with foster children or children with disabilities.

There's no charge for the program.

"One of the cool parts about Early Head Start is that everything in this center is provided," Weber said. "We provide diapers, we provide formula, we provide the food the children eat, we provide essentially everything. There's nothing the families have to bring in."

The staff consists of a lead teacher and assistant teacher for each of the four classrooms, two "floating" substitute teachers, the site supervisor, a family advocate, a home visitor and a cook, who prepares meals for both the Early Head Start Center and the Head Start Center on the New Opportunities campus on Highway 30 East.

Early Head Start is made up of many different pieces: Classroom curriculum, health screenings, social and emotional evaluations, goal-



Michelle Glick (left) is site supervisor of New Opportunities new Early Head Start Center, and Tonya Weber (right) is New Opportunities' Head Start and Early Head Start director.

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New Opportunities opened its Early Head Start Center at 1617 E. 10th St. in January. The building formerly housed various businesses and was renovated to include four classrooms for infants to 3-year-olds.