

NIST CCC 35th anniversary celebration speech

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Walt, thanks for taking the time to attend this event. It really means a lot to us to have you here.

To elaborate on the [NIST] Director's remarks for our 35th anniversary, I decided to share with you some of the stories that I believe define who we are as the NIST CCC community.

To those of you who provided these stories, and many other stories I won't have time to share, thanks.

As Walt mentioned, this center is a nonprofit organization that operates through a partnership between NIST management and the NIST Child Care Association, led by the Board of Directors.

Under this partnership, our community is composed of NIST managers, current and former board members, parents, children, teachers, staff, and friends.

Why has this partnership been so important?

Well, the second half of the 20th century witnessed a huge growth in the number of American women joining the workforce.

By 1970s, many working mothers had become single, widowed, divorced, separated.

The challenge working mothers faced at the time was that licensed day care centers were a rare commodity.

To give you a picture, only 2% of the existing 6 million preschool children at the time were enrolled in one.

Can you imagine the work-life balance during that time?

Luckily, NIST had just moved to the Gaithersburg campus and the management was open to the idea of having a day care center on site.

Back in the 70s, the Bowman House, which would eventually become our first Center, had already been identified as a potential site for this purpose.

But, wait a minute. This center wasn't created until 1983. What happened?

Well, would you believe that employee surveys at the time showed insufficient number of customers to justify the investment?

Yeap, with those results, the idea was dropped like a hot potato. But, NIST employees never gave up.

That same potato was later picked up by the Standards Committee for Women in the early 80s under the leadership of Barbara Levin.

New survey results showed stunning employee support this time.

When funding became an issue, the NIST Standards Employee Benefits Association offered seed money to get the Center started. The first interest-free loan was for \$5,000 and the second for \$10,000.

Now, there was no stopping. NIST management was sold.

The performance plan of Lura Powell, a key player in getting the center off the ground, and many of her colleagues changed that year from research activities to:

“open a child care center by September 1983.”

Our child care center was born.

Who are the founders of the child care center?

The center was founded by Lorna Sniegowski, Janice Knapp-Cordes, Eleanor Bateman, Jennie Covahey, Gerda Sherwood, and Willard Roberts.

I have been on the board only two months. But, it has been long enough to notice an interesting culture.

There is a genuine desire to make the center better for future families. It is contagious.

That kind of environment is nice, of course, But, I was curious to know where it came from. Interestingly, it wasn't until I got in touch with some of the founders that I understood.

When I asked Lorna about her contributions, she humbly told me that they were not that significant. Oh, yeah? that is interesting.

Lorna was the one who summarized the survey results in the 80s, remember? She also served as a volunteer bookkeeper for the center for more than 30 years.

Then, I got in touch with Gerda. She started her efforts to create a child-care-center two years before she had any children.

When the center finally opened, her youngest child was in kindergarten. We didn't offer kindergarten back then.

And with that, the founders established a culture that has lasted to this day.

Are we still the same community we were at the Bowman House?

The quick answer is, of course not. We moved to a state-of-the-art new building and we are 35 years old now.

But, looking carefully, we still have the same values as parents, NIST management, and teachers.

I will talk about our parents first:

We couldn't have opened that first child care center without the continuous stream of parents and friends that volunteered to get the house ready for opening day.

Some built shelves and picnic tables, others made curtains, others spent summer nights painting the walls bright white.

Eventually, the Bowman house and 5 staff members welcomed our first group of children. For years, volunteer parents continued doing things to improve the center.

Listening to these stories knowing that the first Center is now gone made me a little upset. I found myself trying to find something that survived the move as evidence of those days.

Luckily, two weeks ago, I found a little something. A NIST employee and parent who took on a big job in his spare time. Paul Liposky, are you here?

At the Bowman House, we used to have two extended vans that require teachers to install different car seats. For each age group. For each field trip.

Safety was a concern and it was an ordeal to get all the kids strapped in the vans. Slowly, the center was able to raise \$48,000 and bought a bus.

But, the bus needed a driver. Paul rolled up his sleeves, got his CDL, and taking the kids on field trips became his new job.

Yes, I know. He didn't build the bus. He didn't paint the bus. But, he drove the bus. And the bus is still here.

Paul, former CCC families: we have lot to learn from you.

To the current parents: we all know the importance of volunteering in our child's school. The need for volunteers is never ending.

This is our opportunity to pass on this Center's wonderful culture to the next generation.

Now, I will talk about our NIST Management:

We take pride in saying that we recently got NAEYC accreditation. And, of course, we should.

The NAEYC accreditation is nationally recognized as the highest mark of quality in early-childhood education.

The thing is that after reading about our history, I am not surprised that we got it at all.

For one, we used to have this accreditation. We had it for 22 years.

But, ten years ago we had to give it up because we no longer met the square footage per child required by new regulations.

During that time, there was only one way out. We had to find a bigger home. But, we needed support from NIST leadership.

With a lot of work from many parents, the request was brought to NIST management in 2006.

I would like to mention one of the NIST leaders, Kevin Kimball, who played a key role in making the new facility a reality.

It was the perfect storm of events as Kevin left NIST to work for Senator Barbara Mikulski, the chairwoman of the Appropriations Committee at that time.

This Committee funds all of NIST's programs and facilities. Coincidentally, the Senator not only represented Maryland but also was a strong supporter of federal employees.

In his new job, Kevin advocated for additional funds for the construction of a new building to be our child care center.

In 2009, \$7.2 million dollars was included in the NIST budget to build this center.

We are grateful to Senator Mikulski, to Kevin, and to all of the NIST management and parents who made this new facility a reality.

And last, but not least, I will talk about our teachers:

What would we do without the teachers we have? I would argue that the teachers are our greatest asset.

Many of them have been here through ...

expansions, shutdowns, management transitions, accreditation, moves, re-accreditation...

No matter the challenge ... they have stayed with us...

... all the while loving and nurturing our children in a safe environment every day.

One of the key messages I heard from a former CCC parent is that they valued that teachers were there throughout their child's time at the center.

Teacher turnover is very hard on children and this consistency is a big part of the Center's great reputation.

And now I would like to acknowledge some of our amazing staff...

For 10 years of service or more:

- Miss "B" ... 11 years
- Miss Marian I ... 12 years
- Miss Therese ... 13 years
- Miss Ann ... 18 years
- Miss Pat ... 18 years
- Miss Bina ... 20 years
- Miss Sally ... 24 years
- Miss Gem ... 24 years
- Miss Penny ... 28 years
- Miss Cheryl ... 31 years
- Miss Peggy ... ready for this? ... 35 years !

In closing, I would like to say, as a Mom, I am grateful for this center and the education and life skills it gives my children.

As a Board member, I serve so we can work together to preserve this facility for future children.

It was interesting to learn that most of the children of board members that worked to make this new facility a reality graduated from the center before this new facility opened.

They too, as parents before them, worked to better the Center for future generations.

Thank you all for coming.

Now, I would like to introduce the next speaker. With a Master's Degree in early-childhood education and more than 20 years of experience, she became the Executive Director of this Center a year in a half ago. She is a professional development specialist and is passionate about the NAEYC accreditation that we just got. Please welcome, Tracey Rex.