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I heard the Children's Center on campus is celebrating its 50th anniversary soon. How did the center come to be?

Victoria Bain Vrba '20

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December 2019

Question:

Dear Abbot Pennings,

I heard the Children's Center on campus is celebrating its 50th anniversary soon. How did the center come to be?

Victoria Bain Vrba '20

Answer:

My dearest Victoria,

How wonderful it is to write to you about the Children's Center, a place of much joy here on our campus! It is a delight to host little ones here at St. Norbert College so that our community can span so many ages.

The center will indeed celebrate its 50th anniversary soon – in just one month! Although it feels like yesterday (oh, how time flies), the center was officially established Jan. 19, 1970. Mary Soens-Platner '71, a junior psychology student at the time, led the project with the help of psychology professor Davis Dirlam and art professor Charles Peterson. In true St. Norbert College spirit, Mary wished to create an on-campus nursery school where developmental psychology students could work to broaden their laboratory experience.

After obtaining a child care license from Brown County, Mary's splendid vision became a reality. Although the Children's Center is currently located in the basement of Sensenbrenner Hall, it was originally located in the basement of Burke Hall. Seven St. Norbert College education and



Ask the Abbot

As the founder of St. Norbert College, and having a prime seat in the center of campus throughout the years, I, Abbot Bernard Pennings, hold the answers to many of your burning questions about the college.

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psychology students worked in the center during its beginning stages, and Dirlam and education professor Robert Shemky were on call. Mary’s project eventually enabled the college to establish a teacher certification program in early childhood education, highlighting just how influential our remarkable students can be!

Today, the **Children’s Center** offers a developmental child care program and a 4K program. The center serves an average of 60 families per year, employs three full-time and about 25 part-time people who work with about 35 children daily (the children of students, faculty, staff and community members), and provides learning opportunities for about 350 St. Norbert College students in psychology and education.

As you can see, dear Victoria, Mary’s inspiring vision continues to make a difference for students, families and children in our community – even 50 years later. Ah, I am simply astounded by the many ways St. Norbert College students embody our ever-important moto, *docere verbo et exemplo*: To teach by word and example.

Responses to “Ask the Abbot” questions are penned by St. Norbert College staff in the name of Abbot Bernard Pennings, who founded St. Norbert College in 1898.

St. Norbert College

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