

Christian center celebrates 30 years of serving community



Champion Christian School High School Principal Gloria Kerin points to where a new pavilion will be built as Middle School Principal Sharon Pasqualette (left) and South Campus Lead Administrator and Elementary School Principal Belinda Lane (right) hold the plans for the development of an athletic complex at the school's North Campus in Donegal. Linda Harkcom | For the Daily Courier.

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The Christian Family and Children's Center is celebrating 30 years of serving the community with a wide range of services designed to meet the needs of families and children.

"We are very excited about where we are and what God has given to us, Executive Director and cofounder Merle Skinner said. "The idea was to be a distinctly Christian organization helping the community by being an integral part of the community and making it a better place by supporting families and other organizations. And we are definitely doing that on a regular basis, not just in this community but also the region."

The organization was founded in October 1981, when Skinner and his wife Barb Skinner, along with other dedicated Christians, formed a board of directors and rented a vacant funeral home in Indian Head. By January 1982, the new organization was able to offer the community its first program, a preschool. That preschool in Indian Head, which opened with only three students, has 30 years later grown into a full-fledged independent Christian school serving students from preschool through 12th grade, with two campuses -- one in Indian Head and one in Donegal. When Belinda Lane, lead administrator and elementary school principal at the Indian Head campus, began working for the school 21 years ago, it still had only the Indian Head campus but had grown to serving preschool through seventh grade.

"It has been a privilege to serve and watch the school grow along with the center and I have grown along with the center. We all grew as the ministry grew," Lane said. "I think we work hard to be part of the community and see where the need is and being relevant in serving those needs. We don't limit ourselves and we don't limit God."

When Champion Christian School's High School Principal Gloria Kerin joined the school 18 years ago there were only 18 students in grades seven through 12. Now the school has 121 students -- 24 in preschool, 29 in elementary, 31 in middle school and 37 in grades nine through 12. Kerin believes the growth of the school is based on all they offer students, some of which is not available at other high schools, like mission trips, end of the year field trips, post high school studies, AP classes, dual enrollments, online learning, just to name a few.

"We give our kids a lot of individual attention. We spend a lot of time focusing on what God wants them to do," Kerin said.

The school is also popular among the international community and currently has 11 students from other countries enrolled in the high school.

"We are seen as a safe place to put your children that they will get a good education," Kerin said.

Middle School Principal Sharon Pasquarette has been with the organization 16 years. She said she is not surprised by the growth she has seen in those years, but more amazed. She credits Merle Skinner's leadership as the reason.

"Merle always encourages us to be state-of-the-art and cutting edge to give the kids what they need," she said. "It's just the coolest, liveliest place to be."

In addition to the educational services, the Christian Family and Children's Center has other programs available for the community such as Christian counseling services, a Christian library that is open to the public, adult continuing education classes, summer programs and activities.

It also has the New Horizons Pregnancy Resource Center with the goal of helping women find positive alternatives to abortion in a caring and concerned manner. The program has a confidential hotline for those in need at 724-455-2222.

The center even has entertainment options for the community by providing community bus trips to concerts and places of interest as well as hosting an outdoor contemporary Christian music festival each summer called Alloutpraise!

Skinner and those involved with the center are always looking toward the future and planning to expand facilities and services to meet the needs of the community. The next project on the center's horizon is creating an athletic complex at the Donegal campus. In addition to the multipurpose field that is used for soccer and other activities, the group plans to add a walking track, trees for shade and a pavilion that will seat about 200.

"We really want the athletic complex developed, not just for the school's usage, but for the community as well," Skinner said. "We also plan to continue to focus on human services as well as such services for senior citizens."