

HENRICO COUNTY LEADER

April 6, 2001

Volume 4 Number 13

To: Henrico Neighbor

Bulk Mail Permit
U.S. Postage Paid
Permit #20687
Glen Allen, Va

Your weekly source for quality regional news, delivered in a responsible manner



Tom Lippert/Henrico Co. Leader

Melanie Preskitt's second-grade students display some of the pennies they collected during Pemberton's penny drive.

'Rainbow' Founder Strikes Gold

By Wendy Wagner

Gail W. Johnson just might find a real pot of gold at the end of her rainbow.

The Henrico County business owner recently sold two franchises, one in San Antonio, Tex., and another in Atlanta. Her goal is to branch out nationwide, selling franchises of her unique child care business in cities and towns across the nation.

**Unique Child
Care Franchise
Makes Big
Impact in
Business World**



Wendy Wagner/Henrico Co. Leader

Gail Johnson's Henrico-based Rainbow Station childcare center has become a national chain, with centers currently planned in San Antonio and Atlanta.

Johnson's business, Rainbow Station Inc., is not your average child care center. Actually, it's not a daycare center - it's a pre-school, a nursery school, an after-school care center and an infirmary all rolled into one.

Johnson started her business in 1989 after about 20 years as a pediatric nurse. She recognized a big need in the industry - a service for parents whose children either had acute, temporary health problems or long-term

chronic problems or disabilities.

"It didn't matter the severity of the issue. If you had any type of issue, you were struggling. The options for families with children with problems

CONTINUED ON PAGE 11

'Rainbow' Founder Strikes Gold

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

are limited, even today," Johnson said. "Rainbow Station happened because I knew these children needed services."

She decided to begin a care center that would primarily be an educational environment that could accommodate ill or handicapped children.

A licensed RN is on-site in "The Infirmary"

"Having a nurse on-site is not only a benefit to the children with problems, but also a huge benefit to the other children," Johnson said.

"We have seen that when a child comes in (with disabilities) that the other children know that child needs help" and reach out on their own, Johnson said.

Children are grouped in six-month age level increments and progress through the pre-school program until age 5. Once they go off to either public or private school, they can attend Rainbow Station's after-school program, called "The Village," a colorful place that features a library, arcade, cafe, toy room, computer lab, gymnasium and a variety of other activities.

Rainbow Station has degree teachers on staff and is accredited by the National Academy of Early Childhood Programs, which is sponsored by the National Association for the Education of Young Children.

Johnson's business has grown steadily. There are now three Rainbow Stations — one in Hanover, one in Chesterfield and the original West End location near Three Chopt and Cox roads.

In 1996, Johnson was a finalist for Small Business Person of the Year for the Greater Richmond Chamber of Commerce. She also was named one of "The Rising 25" local entrepreneurs by the Richmond Times-Dispatch's business department in conjunc-

tion with the chamber and KPMG.

In 1997, she was named the Small Business Person of the Year by the U.S. Small Business Administration, and that honor brought Johnson and Rainbow Station national exposure. Later that year, Rainbow Station was featured in Entrepreneur magazine.

Johnson was also president of the National Association for Sick Child Daycare at the time — she

//
**Maybe as
we get
good at it,
then we can
open 20 or
30 a year.**
//

served in that post for five years from 1994 to 1999.

It wasn't long before she began getting inquiries about franchising her concept.

In 1999, she decided to go for it. "Prior to 1999, we said no [to inquiries] because my feeling was, unless it could be done well, I didn't want to do it," she said.

The company hired a consultant and formed a Uniform Franchise Offering Circular, a document that spells out how a franchise will work, and an operations manual and marketing plan.

By October of that year, the company was ready to announce its plans to franchise.

"We sent out this flurry of letters and said, okay, we'll see what happens," Johnson recalled.

Last year, Rainbow Station sold its first franchise in San Antonio. That venture is currently in local approval stages and will be under construction by June.

The second franchise, in Atlanta, was sold a few weeks ago.

"That one is in the preliminary site development/land acquisition phase," Johnson said. "In the meantime here, we're frantically running so when they get ready for the next phase, we'll be ready."

She said she has about 40 leads on possible new franchises, but she is no hurry.

"I prefer that we grow slowly," she said. "I want to be sure that we've nailed the quality. We're dealing with children's lives and their success here."

Johnson's plan is to get four or five new franchises "in the pipeline" this year. Ultimately, though, the business potential is huge, she said, because the need for quality care for all children, including those with health problems, is growing nationally.

"Maybe as we get good at it, then we can open 20 or 30 a year," she said.

Meanwhile, on the homefront, Johnson is building a new Rainbow Station Complex on Three Chopt Road to replace the original center, which is all housed in leased properties. The new center should be complete within a couple weeks and the adjoining "Village" for school age children should be done shortly after that.

"Can you imagine moving 300 children into a new building and getting them used to something new?" Johnson asked, slightly breathless. "It's very exciting."

Soccer Players Wanted



The Richmond Capitals Soccer Club is looking for players for the following teams: U-12 Girls and U-14 Girls. Please call 261-KICK(5425) for more information.