

# John Roberts praises spirit at AES Children's Centre opening

Beaming with pride AES climatologist Joan Masterton stood in the middle of the room holding a certificate, the licence to operate a day care centre, presented to her by Herta Fletcher of the Ontario Ministry of Community and Social Services.

Environment minister, John Roberts, in his first remarks to officially open the Sunburst Children's Centre at AES Downsview September 24 said "The Sunburst Children's Centre is open today as a result of long hours of work by many people."

Essentially it is the result of the co-operative effort shown by AES staff, management and unions representing AES employees, to inquiries from a few AES staff who wanted to know why no day care facilities existed in the building. The request was first made to the unions who raised the question at a union-management meeting only to discover that no day care facility existed anywhere in Canada in a federal government building, and none was permitted.

In November 1979 the AES Management Committee (AMC) gave Equal Opportunities for Women (EOW) permission to investigate the need for and the feasibility of a work place day care centre. EOW first questioned female AES staff in their yearly survey by asking them if they felt day care was needed in the building. Response was positive. With the support of AMC and the unions representing AES, EOW sponsored a survey of all AES employees with regard to day care. Results indicated both male and female employees would support it. A representation was then made by AES through Environment Canada to the Treasury Board for permission to create a day care centre. On June 25, 1981 AES was granted permission by Treasury Board to participate in a program designed to facilitate the operation of pilot day care centres in federally-owned or leased buildings. The Sunburst Children's Centre is the first participant in the program to open.

A non-profit, charitable corporation offering full time, quality day care to



*All together now . . . 3-year olds Brian Street and Mia Skarpathiotakis help Environment Minister John Roberts to cut the cake commemorating the opening of the Sunburst Children's Centre at AES Downsview.*

children from birth until five years of age, the centre is unique in supplying infant child care. The corporation is run by a Board of Directors composed of parent-users who are responsible for all administrative and financial decisions, including staff salaries, supplies and equipment.

The aim of the centre is to offer high quality day care at reasonable fees to federal employees and people in the immediate community. Sunburst has a capacity for 37 children. Eventually, when the centre reaches its maximum enrollment, nine qualified and experienced teachers will care for the children. Because of its small size Sunburst is able to offer a very good staff-to-child ratio, not usually found in other day care centres.

The Sunburst Board of Directors is composed of Denis Bourque, Peter

Chen, Joan Masterton, Mike Skarpathiotakis, Roger Street, Chris Stuart, Evelyn Wilson and Eva Voldner. Composition of the board is expected to change as parents with children in the centre gradually replace board members without enrolled children. Two married couples Denis and Sheila Bourque and Sheila and Roman Guzyak at AES headquarters currently have children enrolled at the centre while Mike Skarpathiotakis has two children enrolled.

The supervisor of the Sunburst Children's Centre has also received requests from two pregnant women who wish to enroll their children once they are born, in 1983. A number of requests have arrived at the centre from parents who currently have their children either at other day care centres or with nannies and would like to have their children enter Sunburst as soon as possible.

Sunburst, like many small businesses, is starting small and building its capital



*On behalf of the Sunburst Children's Centre, Joan Masterton receives a copy of the operating licence from Herta Fletcher of the Ontario Government Ministry of Community and Social Services. Looking on are Environment Minister John Roberts and ADMA Jim Bruce.*

resource, in this case children, gradually. Eight children are currently attending with more enrolled to attend in the coming months. Mr. Roberts half jokingly remarked at the official opening that he expected in the near future to be receiving a request from AES to enlarge the day care facilities as news of the centre spread and enrollment reached its maximum.

Environment Canada will cover the cost of renovations and maintenance for the area. Generous donations have been received by the Sunburst Board of Directors from the Province of Ontario, the City of North York, the Public Service Alliance of Canada, the Professional Institute of the Public Service, Levi Strauss Canada, Inc., and the Ontario Federation of Labour. AES employees have also given the centre financial support with interest-free loans, donations and lottery ticket purchases. Dr. Fouad Fanaki donated one of his own water colours to be raffled off to raise money for the centre.

A doll centre including a sink, stove, refrigerator, table and chairs was bought by the Board of Directors, at a small discount from the Correctional Services section of the office of the Solicitor General, Mr. Kaplan (the local M.P. for the area).

The Department of Public Works was

responsible for the renovations and design of the centre, including the play area outside.

The minister and his entourage briefly toured the centre gaily decorated with children's drawings, streamers and weather balloons. While admiring the doll centre everyone tried to keep a straight face on hearing the strains of a humorous children's record being played in the background.

ADMA Jim Bruce then made a short speech, praising the work of the people involved with the centre and introducing Mr. Roberts, citing him as a minister recognized for his innovations. After introducing the Sunburst Board of Directors, Mr. Bruce gave the floor to Mrs. Herta Fletcher who presented Joan Masterton with the licence to operate the day care centre.

In his speech Mr. Roberts stressed the co-operation that had existed among EOW, the unions and management in creating the centre. Commenting on the organization of the centre, he remarked how delighted Mme Sauvé, the speaker of the House of Commons, must be to see a day care opening in one of her former portfolios, the Department of the Environment, where she first tried to

initiate work place day care.

Brian a son of AES employee Roger Street and Mia daughter of Mike Skarpathiotakis stood hand in hand holding the knife with the minister as he kneeled to cut the cake with them to mark the official opening.

The centre, packed to overflowing with people watching the ceremony through glass partitions marking the different sections, burst into spontaneous, sustained applause after the cake was cut.

While outside someone mentioned that an anemometer would eventually be mounted to the roof of the children's storage shed "We are raising little meteorologists," interjected Joan Masterton. Turning to Mr. Bruce the minister quipped "I hear this is part of your program to increase the number of meteorologists." Time will tell!