



Thirty-six years ago, "I was new to the area and pregnant with my first child. I was a parent enrolled in our Family Life Education Department. I participated with my son and later had twin daughters."

Laurie Cornelius
Clark College director of services for children and families

LEARNING & GROWING

Clark
College
dedicates
new Oliva
center

By **TOM VOGT**
Columbian staff writer

Thursday's dedication of the Oliva Family Early Learning Center is just the most recent transition Laurie Cornelius has seen in 36 years at Clark College.

Some changes have been in programs, such as a recent agreement with Concordia University in Portland. It allows Clark students to earn a four-year degree in early childhood education without leaving campus.

That innovative partnership was

showcased during Thursday's ribbon-cutting. As Clark's director of services for children and families, Cornelius can appreciate how the

expanded early learning center will provide a wider array of services and programs for local families and Clark students.

The center serves about 225 children each week, from infants to 10-year-olds.

Clark also helps college students prepare for careers in child care and early learning. So, the new site will expand their opportunities for practical experience, said Tim Cook, Clark's interim vice president of instruction.

Other program transitions have been in Cornelius' own life. Her current position represents her fifth different role there.

Thirty-six years ago, "I was new to the area and pregnant with my first child," she said. "I was a parent enrolled in our Family Life Education Department. I participated with my son and later had twin daughters."

"When they were 3, I became a part-time preschool teacher and parent educator," she said.

After a couple of years, she was



Guests at Thursday's dedication read cards that say, in part, "Children, families and staff have a right to be heard, to belong, to be understood."



GREG WAHL-STEPHENS for The Columbian
Ruby Moore admires the floor-to-ceiling tree trunk that is part of the interior of the Oliva Family Early Learning Center, following Thursday's dedication at Clark College.

Dedication:

From Page C1

hired full time as a parent educator. Her next role was as a full-time faculty member in the Family Life Department.

"Our Early Childhood Education lab school, which operated a child care program, was facing budget challenges, and I became ECE faculty, teaching classes and running the curriculum lab. I was asked to save the program by balancing the budget.

"In 2000, we reorganized and integrated our services and programs into one program called Child and Family Studies," Cornelius said. She became director of services for children and families.

Thursday's dedication introduced the public to Phase I of the Oliva Family Early Learning Center, on the north edge of the campus at 1933 Fort Vancouver Way.

The state provided \$1 million, but the project required a matching donation, which was provided by Vancouver philanthropists Steve and Jan Oliva.

The 5,000-square-foot Phase I building features two classroom spaces, a large multipurpose room, kitchen and resource center. There also is an outdoor play area.

Clark's degree collaboration with Concordia University was unveiled a few months ago, in partnership with Lower Columbia College and Centralia College. But Thursday's event gave provost Mark Wahlers and other Concordia officials a chance to celebrate with their Clark colleagues.

"We're extending educational opportunities into Southwest Washington," Wahlers said. "This allows us to remove some barriers."

Phase II, which still is in the funding and design planning stages, will provide about 16,000 square feet with seven classrooms and an art studio.