

Clark fetes new facility for children

It's Phase I of Oliva Family Early Learning Center

By **TOM VOGT**

Columbian staff writer

A landmark center for children opens a new chapter Thursday when Clark College dedicates Phase I of the Oliva Family Early Learning Center.

Phase I augments facilities built in the 1970s for Clark's Child and Family Services department. At the time, it was hailed as the only parent-participation preschool operated by a college in Washington or Oregon.

The 5,000-square-foot Phase I building features two flexible classroom spaces and a large multipurpose room, kitchen and resource center. It also includes an outdoor play environment.

The state of Washington provided \$1 million for Phase I on the condition that the college raised matching funds.

A \$1 million gift from Jan and Steve Oliva of Vancouver allowed the project to move forward. Steve Oliva served as president and chief executive officer of Hi-School Pharmacy. Jan Oliva's connections to Clark College include 15 years of service on the Clark College Foundation board.

Jan Oliva said that as a young parent, she benefited from Clark's early learning program.

The Early Learning Center is on the north end of the main campus, 1933 Fort Vancouver Way.

Phase II is still in the planning stages of design and funding. When completed, Phase II will replace the two remaining buildings in the Children and Family Services complex.

"The challenge has been to configure a way to keep services in operation while construction is under way," said Laurie Cornelius, Clark College director of children and family services.

Phase II — about 16,000 square feet — will feature seven classrooms, an art studio and an observation deck for Clark students who are preparing for careers in the early-learning field.

Clark officials noted that while the college's programming and instruction are respected, its facilities have not kept pace with advances in early childhood education.

"For more than a decade, it has been our dream to have a new Early Learning Center facility," Cornelius said.

Did you know?

■ Clark College's original Family Life Program (parent cooperative preschools) started immediately after World War II and evolved out of Kaiser Shipyard kindergartens.

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Kitty Welsh of Vancouver donated money for the "Little Penguins' Gardens" in the Early Learning Center, in honor of her late husband, Paul.

"At a time when our state funding continues to decline, it's clear that donor support is vitally important for to-

day's students and to help us meet our region's need for the future," Clark College President Bob Knight said in a news release.

"We are deeply grateful to Jan and Steve Oliva and to Kitty Welsh for their generosity and their commitment to Clark College, our students and our community," Knight said.

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