

El Pomar recognizes Court Care milestone

BY NANETTE ANDERSON

Courtroom dramas and tragedies play out each week day in the Fourth Judicial District Court and Colorado Springs Municipal Court. Those stories are not suitable for children.

For 14 years, Court Care for the Pikes Peak Region has made sure there is a place in the judicial complex at 270 S. Tejon St., where children can play and hear soothing stories read by caring adults.

In October 2016, Court Care served its 50,000th child since the organization was founded in 2003. The milestone and one of the co-founders of the organization were celebrated at an El Pomar-hosted event March 14 at the Penrose House.

Terry Harris, retired El Paso County administrator, was presented with the inaugural Terry R. Harris Award to acknowledge his dedication to the program. While

accepting the award, he praised the assistance of Executive Director Jan Weiland, who also co-founded the program.

"When you don't know what to say, you say 'thank you,'" Harris said during his acceptance remarks. "Serving those 50,000 children has long-lasting effects. Future generations will benefit from the impact of Court Care and the impact on their families and friends cannot be measured."

The mission of Court Care is to provide quality child care in a safe, family-friendly environment for the children of individuals who have court-related business.

Court Care staff members are licensed caregivers employed by Early Connections Learning Centers. Diane Price, president and CEO of Early Connections, was also acknowledged at the celebration for her expertise in making the Court Care facility a safe and enjoyable place for children.

Childcare facilities are rare in courthouse settings and only one similar program exists in Colorado. Court Care serves children six weeks to 14 years old when the complex is open. The service is free for anyone who needs to be present at the judicial complex, even those who are serving on juries.

Colorado Springs Mayor John Suthers congratulated the Court Care board members, staff and founders.

"I have spent many days in courtrooms where many human dramas are played out that are for mature audiences only," Suthers said. "Court Care is a pleasant refuge for children."

Ninety-five percent of the families served are low-income families and 75 percent of the children served are living in single-mother

households. The facility is most often used by families involved in domestic relations cases.

Kyle Hybl, chief operating officer and general counsel for El Pomar, welcomed the attendees to the Penrose House. El Pomar has given \$56,000 to Court Care.

"We support the work that is done by Court Care to take a child out of the courtroom and not expose them to the trials and tribulations of court," Hybl said.

County Commissioner Darryl Glenn told the crowd gathered at Penrose House that having been in family law practice he had seen many children in courtrooms before 2003.

"I'm very proud to be a part of an effort that helped form this service for families," he said. "It should be a model for the rest of the state."

Jennifer Viehman, senior deputy district attorney and co-president of the Court Care Board of Directors, said she has seen the children in Court Care having fun and being shielded from the stresses of courtroom activities.

"Every time I'm there, kids are having blast. They are involved in educational activities, reading books, and doing crafts," she said. "Each child leaves with a book."

The Court Care organization has begun a fundraising effort to raise \$50,000 in honor of the 50,000 children served. Court Care relies on the support of individuals, corporations, foundations and governmental grants to provide childcare services.

Viehman said that some of the organization's needs include donations of diapers and books. The Court Care website also lists its most wanted items including jumbo crayons and construction paper.

One of the fundraising activities is the Protect the Children 5K Run/Walk on April 22 in North Monument Valley Park. The 2017 event is the fifth annual race organized by Court Care.

For more information or to find out how to support the organization, go to court-care.org.



Sallie Clark, left, Court Care board member, and El Paso County Commissioner Darryl Glenn attend the Court Care ceremony to honor serving 50,000 children at the Fourth Judicial District Court complex.



Terry R. Harris, retired El Paso County administrator, was honored March 14 for his longstanding support of the Court Care program that provides child care for children six weeks to 14 years old while their families are in court or serving on juries. Photos by Nanette Anderson

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