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Posted by: [IDEM]
Contact: Allison Fore
Phone: (317) 232-8500
Email: afore@idem.IN.gov

IDEM honors Valparaiso's Little U Academy for environmental stewardship

Indiana Department of Environmental Management (IDEM) Northwest Regional Office Director Hala Kuss presented Little U Academy in Valparaiso with a plaque congratulating the organization for its induction into the Five Star Environmental Recognition Program for Child Care Facilities today.

In qualifying for five stars, Little U Academy has taken voluntary steps to protect the children in their care from environmental hazards. Little U Executive Director Jeannine Hornback said, "Completing IDEM's Five Star Program shows our continued commitment in providing the best child care and educational environment for the community and future generations. >From conception through daily operations, we feel that taking a 'green' approach is our obligation to the environment. Little U incorporated Energy Star thermostats, windows, furnaces and appliances into our new facility. For further energy savings, Little U insulated interior and exterior walls, ceilings and all hot water pipes."

Hornback said the facility practices other important steps on a daily basis. "We use reusable dishes, 'green' products and we recycle. Our parents and the general public are always informed with current information on our website which makes a difference not only at Little U but also at home."

The Five Star program recognizes child care facilities that go above and beyond mandatory licensing requirements and demonstrate environmental stewardship. Facilities earn one, three or five stars based on the extent of their voluntary measures; IDEM assists facilities in implementing the plans and conducts site visits before granting facilities membership. In the past two years, stars have been awarded to 58 child care providers to make their facilities safer for almost 4,000 Hoosier children.

Kuss explained why the Five Star program was originally launched. "We developed a way to recognize child care providers because we believe children deserve a safe place to learn and play," she said. "With over 100,000 children attending day care in more than 4,000 facilities throughout the state, we felt child care providers play an important role in educating parents about environmental health hazards such as mercury, lead and radon."

IDEM's Five Star program recognizes child care facilities that go above and beyond statutory requirements to demonstrate environmental stewardship. Before granting membership, IDEM evaluates applicants based on their voluntary measures, such as reducing children's exposure to mercury, lead, mold or asbestos.

Joining Little U Academy in the Five Star program are Dream Weaver Before & After School and Sugar 'N Spice, both of Indianapolis; Bethany Little Disciples, Evansville; First English Lutheran Nursery School, Mishawaka; Early Childhood Development Center, Inc. at Notre Dame and Early Childhood Development Center, Inc. at Saint Mary's College, South Bend.

Additional information about the program can be obtained by calling Karen Teliha, Community Environmental Health & Education Coordinator, at (800) 988-7901 or by visiting www.idem.IN.gov/4180.htm.

About IDEM

IDEM (www.idem.IN.gov) implements federal and state regulations regarding the environment. Through compliance assistance, incentive programs and educational outreach, the agency encourages and aids businesses and citizens in protecting Hoosiers and our environment.

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