

HIGHLAND PARK & DEERFIELD

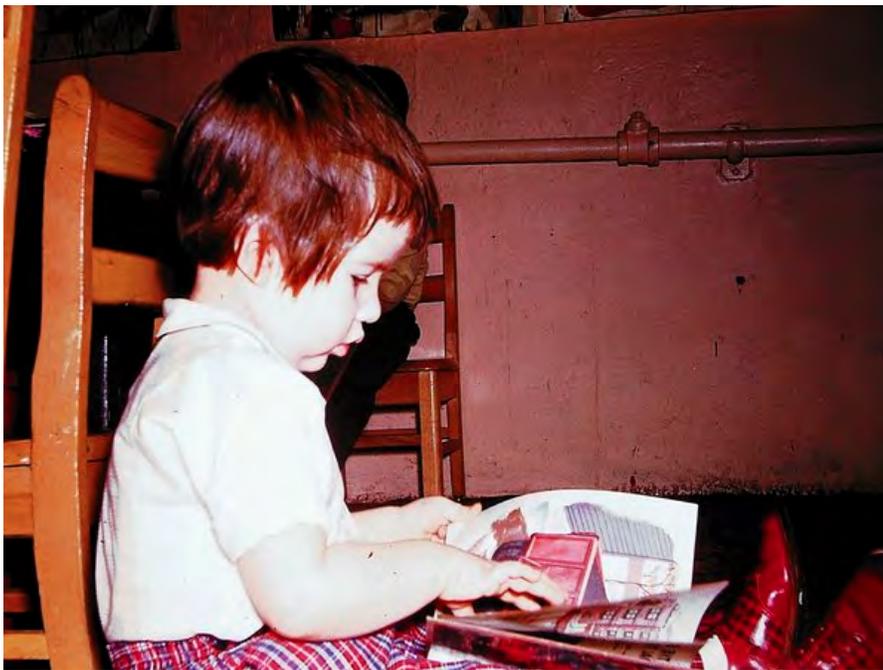
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Highland Park Community Nursery children read and play in their classrooms located in the YWCA basement on Laurel Avenue in Highland Park, ca. 1953-1958. (Current location of the Highland Park Public Library parking lot.) (Highland Park Community Nursery School / February 8, 2014)

By Nancy L. Webster
Highland Park Historical Society archivist
10:12 a.m. CST, February 8, 2014

Logs from Highland Park trees provide seating in an outdoor classroom's miniature amphitheater that also has a sandbox and murals at Highland Park Community Nursery School.

Various pieces of this outdoor classroom share the distinction of having been designed, curated or provided by former students who are now professionals or as part of Eagle Scout or Bat Mitzvah projects.

The not-for-profit institution provides licensed, accredited day care and early education to more than 120 students at two locations in Highland Park. It opened March 19, 1951,

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after a survey revealed a need and desire for accessible early education with extended hours. Residents of the Home for Aged and Disabled Railway Workers on Saint Johns Avenue hewed teeter totters and "drag" toys, built benches and installed coat hooks. Charter board members solicited toys, books and other furnishings. Working mothers and housewives signed up their children.

Family Service of Highland Park (later renamed Family Service of South Lake County) led both the survey efforts and provided initial seed money that included allocations from a United Way of Lake County predecessor, the Highland Park Community Chest. The local United Way provided funding to the school into the 21st Century.

In the 1960s, "Community" served as a training facility for the fledgling Head Start Program. Bilingual teachers joined the staff in the 1970s. Community continues to evolve to meet Highland Park's day care and early education needs.

In 2012, at the suggestion of District 113 Superintendent Dr. George Fornero, Community Nursery's Little Giants Day Care opened at Highland Park High School to care for children of district employees. The nursery school celebrates childhood through its core mission that "Every child deserves to thrive" mission and looking to serve the community's needs.

Webster is the archivist at the Highland Park Historical Society. This article was written using resources in the society's Archives and Research Collections; chiefly the records of the United Way of the North Shore and interviews with the school's current and former staff, funded in part by Henry X Arenberg Archives Preservation Fund. Visit highlandparkhistory.com for more information.

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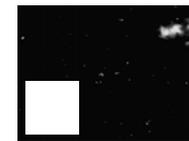
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