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From The Morning Call -- June 11, 2004

Early childhood center to open in 2005
School will be the first built in Phillipsburg in 30 years.

By Harley Payette
Special to The Morning Call

The Phillipsburg School Board was aided in groundbreaking for the new early childhood center off Center Street on Thursday by children who may attend preschool classes there.

A crowd of more than 100 people watched 3-year-olds from the Shimer School dig shovels into the ground while kindergartners sang "It's a Grand Old Flag" to celebrate the start of construction on the first new school in Phillipsburg in 30 years.

When the 86,442-square-foot preschool opens in September 2005 it will house all of the school's kindergarten students as well as the majority of the district's 3- and 4-year-olds. For the first time there will be no waiting list for early childhood education.

Mayor Harry Wyant, who attended the celebration with several council members, stressed the importance of providing early education.

"I believe in a good foundation for our children and this is going to serve as that foundation," Wyant said. "Like a building's foundation is the beginning, this early childhood center is the beginning."

The \$18.7 million center is being financed by New Jersey through the Schools Construction Corp. under a 1997 state Supreme Court order mandating equal facilities in the state's 30 poorest districts, including Phillipsburg.

George Strachan, Schools Construction Corp. director of communications, said the project is emblematic of a commitment by Gov. Jim McGreevey to school construction. The state is spending more than \$1 billion in school construction statewide.

Though the state has promised the September 2005 start date, the board was taking no chances as children released dozens of butterflies for good luck.

Assistant Superintendent Jackie Attinello said the practice was based on an American Indian legend that if you really wanted something you caught a butterfly, told the butterfly your wish and released it into the air.

"With all these butterflies that are going to be released," she said, "this makes me so confident that all our wishes will come true."

Harley Payette is
a freelance reporter.

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