

# Praises Abound at Grand Opening of SIUE New Life Head Start/Early Head Start Center

by Patricia Merritt

March 23 2024 7:35 AM



**EDWARDSVILLE** - On the first full day of spring, Southern Illinois University Edwardsville officials, community partners, parents, staff and other well-wishers let the

wind carry their cheers as the ceremonial ribbon was cut on Wednesday, March 20 at the front doors of the SIUE New Life Head Start/Early Head Start (HS/EHS) Center in Lebanon.

“As SIUE Chancellor (James T.) Minor always says, SIUE is a place where you can go from infant to graduate school, from infant to dental medicine and from infant to the school of pharmacy,” said SIUE East St. Louis Center Executive Director Timothy Staples, EdD, during the ribbon-cutting ceremony. “Head Start/Early Head Start is an integral part of the educational process that SIUE provides.”

“Head Start/Early Head Start Program Director Carolyn Jason is a jewel,” continued Staples. “During an unprecedented pandemic, Mrs. Jason was analyzing the population movement within the county area, was seeking out spaces and partnerships, and I believe she found a great partnership with New Life Church.”

“The data was saying that a lot of families were moving east,” Jason informed the crowd, “so we started looking for property. We found this property available for lease through New Life Church. It had once been a daycare but was sitting empty.”

EH/EHS secured the site before the pandemic hit, and the Center sat empty with a lease in place for almost three years. The building at 689 Scott Troy Road has six classrooms and is equipped to accommodate 80 children. The Center, which opened Feb. 7, is designed to serve children 15-months to five years old and families in St. Clair County. Longtime HS/EHS staffer and center coordinator Kathleen Appleby relocated from the Bluffview Center to manage New Life Head Start Center.

“I want to thank my administrative team who were instrumental in bringing all of this together,” said Jason, who went on to express gratitude for SIUE Facilities Management, Head Start Policy Council, Head Start parents and others. “We’re so happy to be in this area and provide these services.”

“We are thankful for this partnership,” said Bishop Geoffrey V. Dudley Sr., PhD, DMin, pastor of New Life in Christ Interdenominational Church. “Partnerships come because of values being aligned. It’s not about money. We are on the same path for doing what will help families in our community.”

Michael Lirios and Yudella Mosi, of Belleville, parents of Michael Jr., are overly excited to have their three-year-old at the Center.

“I love the set-up. I love the space. I love that they encourage potty training,” gushed Mosi, who earned a bachelor’s in human resource management in 2019 from SIUE. Her mother, Aziza Mosi, is also an SIUE alumna. “I also like that they have a Head Start

grandmother (foster grandparent Linda Washington). That makes me very comfortable, because Michael is used to being around his grandmother.”

“I like the security, and the fact that you have to get buzzed in to enter,” said Lirios. “That’s important in this day and time.”

“I also enjoy having a mini teacher’s conference with the teacher almost every day,” continued Lirios. “I’ll ask how he did today, and his teacher will give me details. Then we go home and reinforce what he has learned during the evenings and weekends.”

The couple has two other children: a 1 ½ year-old son, Monroe, who will be enrolled at the Center in September, and six-month-old daughter, M’dori.

“Quality, safe childcare is crucial,” said Mosi. “It’s also extremely expensive. We are so thrilled to have an opportunity to have our children at this Head Start Center and for no cost!”

The [SIUE Head Start/Early Head Start Program](#) serves more than 860 families and children birth through age five, including children with special needs, throughout St. Clair County. The program also provides services to expectant mothers. The program is housed in nine early childhood centers, seven managed directly by SIUE staff and two collaborations. The program includes a rigorous school readiness program and provides comprehensive services, such as health/ dental screenings and family engagement and support activities.

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