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Danny Snyder/Staff

happy as art teacher and teacher's aid Molly Mathews (right) grinds ice for snow cones at Sunbeam Child Care Center. Helen Post-Brown (center-left), owner and director, dishes up the snow for flavoring.

Sunbeam sets high standards

By Sam Vargo

BUSINESS EDITOR

FAIRMONT — At Sunbeam Child Care Center, a class of three- and four- year olds watch eagerly as art teacher Molly Mathews grinds ice for snow cones.

They're a happy bunch of children, and being that it's Christmas week, Mathews sings Christmas songs with them.

Sunbeam's 60 enrolled children, between 12 months and 12 years old, can now boast that their school has been accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), said Helen Post-Brown, owner and director.

It took a whole year to receive this accreditation. During the final process, NAEYC officials visited Sunbeam and stayed for an entire day, where they visited and observed every class in the school's 12-classroom building at 1654 Mary Lou Retton Drive, Post-Brown said.

Sunbeam is one of only 12 child care centers accredited in the state of West Virginia by the NAEYC.

quality of early childhood education. Approximately 13,000 programs are engaged in seeking NAEYC accreditation now," Post-Brown said.

The prestigious NAEYC certification has only been achieved by about 7 percent of early childhood programs nationwide — some 6,050 programs serving 566,025 children, as of this past September, Post-Brown said.

Established in the fall of 1980, Sunbeam started as a pre-school inside Post-Brown's home, and still remains attached to her home in a residential setting.

The majority of Sunbeam's children are from Marion County, but they also come from Morgantown, Clarksburg, Bridgeport and Grafton, Post-Brown said.

It's a competitive industry — the child care business, and parents have a wide choice of where they take their children. They often make choices based upon a school's credibility, location and accreditation, she said.

"It's a very different job. We're working on live products. People are very protective of their children and they really should be protective," Post-Brown said.