

Retiring 'Mother Goose' taught generations of town's preschoolers

BY SANDRA BOLAN
sbolan@yrmg.com

Mother Goose is flying the coop.

Pat Byer, who owned and operated Stouffville's Mother Goose Academy for 43 years, has closed the school.

"I feel that I served the community well and it's just time to hang it up, I guess," she said.

"I never felt I went to work. It was a fun job for me," she said.

But she hasn't given up teaching.

Ms Byer, 75, will return to instructing cooking classes through Epicure home parties.

Whether it be the preschool classroom or kitchen, Ms Byer is comfortable in both.

About 30 years ago, after taking cooking classes in Markham and Toronto, she catered on the side.

Ms Byer also conducted cooking classes in the back of Card's Appliances' former location about 27 years ago.

"It was fun. It was a nice little adventure I got myself involved in," she said.

But after about four years, she had to pack up her knives and sauce pans because life became too busy.

Mother Goose started in Ms Byer's basement at the suggestion of the late Lorne Boadway, who at the time was Summitview Public School's principal.

Ms Byer, who now lives in Mount Albert, was a reading supervisor for the York Region District School Board but she wanted to take time off to raise her first child.

Mr. Boadway suggested she run a preschool at home until she was ready to return to school.

She never did return.

The preschool outgrew her east-side basement and she moved it the Stouffville Pentecostal Church, then to Springvale Baptist Church in 1995.

Mother Goose offered three days of preschool as well as junior and senior kindergarten programming that consisted of pre-

reading skills, math, artistic and language development, music and public speaking.

The latter two were especially important to Ainsley Card who went there in 1975 and sent her two children there within the past decade.

"They thought it was kind of neat to go somewhere I had gone," she said.

"Kids enjoy it so much and it's a great way to learn," Ms Card said of the music component.

"I was shocked at what four-year-olds could memorize," she said.

Ms Byer thought of closing the school for a little while now, but parents kept begging her to keep it open so their next child could attend.

"They're still saying it. But it's not going to continue," Ms Byer said, noting she has no regrets.

Like Ms Card, a number of former students enrolled their children in Mother Goose to be taught by Auntie Pat, Auntie Jennifer, Auntie Susan and Auntie Julie.

Admission was kept small to maintain the "family environment".

This year, Ms Byer taught her eldest grandchild.

"It was wonderful," she said.

Even after 40 years, Ms Byer never tired of teaching the young ones because they are "untainted by the world and very honest. Every day some child would say something that would make you say wow".

Like when the kids were working on this year's Mother's Day art project, Ms Byer asked a child what colour his mother's hair was. He said, "black but she makes it blond".

"I should have kept a book," she said.

"It leaves a big hole in daycare because now kids are just left with daycare centres," Ms Card said.

An open house will be held this fall for alumni/family of alumni and teachers from Mother Goose to honour Ms Byer and the school's closing.



Pat Byer and her grandson – and student – Sam Laverty. Ms Byer got to know hundreds of local children as owner and operator of Stouffville's Mother Goose Academy for 43 years. She retired this month and closed the popular school located in Springvale Baptist Church.

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