

MILLERTON NEWS

Astor Early Childhood Center celebrates legislative grants

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MILLERTON — A party was held at the Astor Early Childhood facility on Park Street Thursday morning to celebrate the agency's receiving \$20,000 in legislative grants.

According to the main Astor Web site at www.astorservices.org, the nonprofit organization, which has locations throughout the Mid-Hudson Valley, operates programs that provide support for preschoolers and children with behavioral and emotional problems. The organization currently serves 6,000 children each year.

The Millerton branch of Astor Early Childhood has operated for 30 years.

"We really depend on the public and private partnership to make sure we have the resources to make this all possible," James McGuirk, executive director of Astor said. "One of the things we do know is that investing in young children pays significant dividends in the course of a child's life. So today is really a chance to thank [State Senator] Vincent Leibell and [State Assemblyman] Marcus Molinaro for helping getting us state dollars for the organization."

McGuirk said both Leibell and Molinaro were able to procure \$10,000 each in funding from the state.

The money is being used for necessary safety improvements to the building and program upgrades.

"We had replaced some sprinkler heads because, when they were installed years ago, there were issues about how they were installed," McGuirk said. "From a program point of view, we will be putting plumbing inside of a classroom so we can meet our standards of how a classroom should operate. Finally, we will be installing observation mirrors so we can bring in parents to observe their children. We will be able to train some of the parents on how to deal with their kids. We will be able to do this now without the kids knowing that their parents are there."

Senior Director of the Millerton branch, Mariley Najdek, said the program is important for children and parents preparing to enter the school system.

"I really believe Head Start is more than just a day care center," Najdek said. "We also get the parents ready to tackle the public school system. It helps parents learn about how to deal with their children."

Molinaro said the work Astor does is "phenomenal" and much-admired.

"There are children and families who very much need their services," he said. "What Astor does to improve the quality of life in these communities is vital. They assist them to ensure they have a robust program."

"Our interest in Dutchess County is to improve the capacity of the county," Leibell said. "Astor is part of that so all of the children and families get the good quality of education that they need."