

New Leader 7/15/98
Le Jardin:

Building better children

By STEVE MCLLOUD
Staff Writer

If you've driven by Mowery Drive, you can't help but notice them — the giant children blocks outlined in bright primary colors that serve as pillars holding up the roof of the new Le Jardin children's day care facility.

And if the blocks aren't enough, gigantic 'crayons' — red, yellow and blue ones — are in the rear playyard, holding up the gazebo.

See LE JARDIN, 5A

Not only child's play at center

LE JARDIN, from 1A

"I wanted the outside of the building to be something that children could feel comfortable with," said Eddie Berrones, executive director of Le Jardin and a Homestead councilman.

"I wanted something more conducive to the environment."

And indeed he achieve that. Berrones has also completely changed the curriculum, hoping to take the center in a new direction. He wants to introduce more of a learning environment. In doing so, Berrones has been able to obtain computers which have been installed for the children to use.

"I see the facility not so much as a place where children can come to stay," explained Berrones, "but instead where a child can come to develop."

The building where this particular Le Jardin center is located — there are five in all — was previously a CHI clinic. When Le Jardin purchased the building, Berrones' biggest concern was its appearance and the potential safety hazards.

For instance, the entrance to CHI once opened onto Mowery Drive. Now, with the renovations that have been made, the entrance is off to the side, cutting down the danger for kids to be hit by traffic.

Expected to open up just in time for the new school year this fall, the center will be the newest addition to the four that exist: two in Homestead and two in Florida City. In all, the centers will employ 80 people and serve close to 500 children, whose ages range from birth to 5 years old.

For the most part, Le Jardin tends to serve the less affluent people. However, parents who bring their children to the center must adhere to at least one condition: they must have a job.

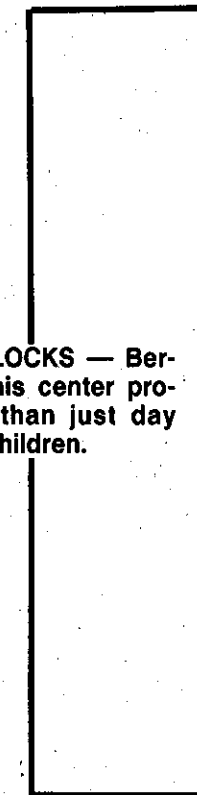
Cost for the day care center ranges from \$5 to \$75 a week. Le Jardin determines each cost on an individual basis, based on a sliding scale regarding the parent's earning wages.

"After parents see what we've done to this new center," said Berrones, "they'll take more pride when they bring their child here."



PHOTOS BY STEVE MCLLOUD

A COLORFUL WORLD — Le Jardin director Eddie Berrones leans against one of the giant crayons that seem to hold up the roof of the gazebo at Le Jardin.



BUILDING BLOCKS — Berrones says his center provides more than just day care for the children.

