

Preschool saved from shutdown

Bethany
Baymonte Christian School secures lease, working on license

By JONDI GUMZ

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SCOTTS VALLEY — The future of the Early Childhood Learning Center, in limbo since Bethany University's shutdown announcement in mid-June, is secure for the next two years.

Baymonte Christian School has obtained a two-year lease with the Bethany Corp. for the preschool at 570 Bethany Drive and is working with the state to transfer the preschool license, Baymonte Principal Steve Patterson said Wednesday.

The changeover, slated for Sept. 1, means the preschool in the redwoods for more than 25 years will stay open, with the same staff, same program

and the same rates.

"It's all about continuity," Patterson said.

That's good news for the families of the 28 children who attend the preschool, director Helena Coffelt and her staff of five.

"We're so excited," Coffelt said. "Out of the ashes arises our little school."

She added, "We do have openings."

Coffelt arrived a little more than a year ago from Virginia, where she had built up a preschool to 200 students.

She grew enrollment in Scotts Valley from 26 to 42 students, then ran into turbulence because of Bethany's financial difficulties. Because the

preschool's license was held by the university, some parents stressed by the uncertainty found other preschools for their children.

"We were getting calls, people asking 'Do you have space?'" said Patterson.

Baymonte started a preschool in 1973 at its main campus on Granite Creek Road and in 2002 added Baymonte Preschool Too on Scotts Valley Drive, formerly a parent participation preschool. Both are licensed by the state and accredited by the Association of Christian Schools International and the Western Association of Schools and Colleges.

Patterson credited Coffelt with



JOHN WILLIAMS/SENTINEL

Renee Norlin reads a book to preschoolers at The Early Childhood Learning Center in Scotts Valley on Wednesday.

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taking action.

"She and Jan Rupp (who oversees Bethany's teacher education program) came over to explore what we could do," he said. "We have a longtime relationship. We hire teachers out of their program. We would hate to see a Christian preschool go away."

When Patterson compared the staffing, hours, program and tuition, he found many similarities.

"It seemed like a natural fit," he said.

The Baymonte board agreed.

"The two business models synchronize," said Rob Brough, Baymonte

board president, who was impressed with the attitude of the Early Childhood Learning Center teachers. "They said, 'We'll do whatever it takes.'"

Scotts Valley parent Melissa Kendall was thinking of following the preschool teachers to their next job when her son turned 3.

"They're very personal, very attentive," she said, recalling how they sent her photos via iPhone of her 5-year-old daughter participating in activities.

Patterson said Baymonte had proposed a lease-purchase and a takeover as options, but was told Bethany is in negotiations with another university to come in.

Staff from Olivet University in San Francisco toured the campus Wednesday.

"The hope would be we

AT A GLANCE

EARLY CHILDHOOD
LEARNING CENTER

WHAT: Preschool for children ages 2 1/2 to 6

WHERE: 570 Bethany Drive, Scotts Valley

HOURS: 7:30 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday through Friday

DIRECTOR: Helena Coffelt

NEW LICENSEE: Baymonte Christian School

RATES: Mornings only, \$350 to \$680; full-time, \$485 to \$985 per month.

INFORMATION: www.ecclpreschool.org, 438-7980 or Steve Patterson at 438-0100.

would develop a relationship with the new owners," said Patterson.