

## Friends of Children Award



### Ron Blatz

Even in 2009, men in early childhood education are not particularly common. They were less so in 1976 when Ron Blatz entered the field. He met a young woman named Anne Sherlock while attending Bible School at Providence College (then Winnipeg Bible College). Anne shared her dream of starting up a child care centre and although Ron was very impressed by her ideas, he realized that growing up on a farm in south eastern Manitoba had given him virtually no exposure to the role of men in the ece field. Early education and child care were roles fulfilled by women in those days. Ron did decide to take the plunge, however, and soon joined Anne and three other educators at the Roseberry Day Nursery located in the Bethel Baptist Church, in St. James, Manitoba.

When Ron began his own family, thinking that work in ECE might not provide enough pay to raise a family, he returned to school. His carpentry course at Red River College was completed successfully but his graduation year was one of the worst years for construction starts in Manitoba and Ron soon found that working in a sign factory making wooden molds was not a lucrative venture either. About that time, his friend at Roseberry Day Nursery called to tell him that she and her husband wanted to begin their family. She invited Ron to take a position that would eventually lead to becoming the director of the centre. He leaped at the chance. Soon he was engaged in more studies – this time in ece courses that would help him become more qualified in the field of child development and administration. Thus began his work as an early childhood educator - a role that Ron loves and feels he was meant to fill!

In 1983, the Roseberry Day Nursery moved to the Annex of Britannia School and in 1985 changed its name in to Discovery Children's Centre. Ron had become its Executive Director in November of 1982. Currently, he works on the community side of that role, while



another early education administrator, working under his direction, has responsibility for the programming and operations of the centre. In the thirty-three years since he first became involved with the centre, much has changed. Enrolment has increased; additional programming has been included (now Infant/Toddler through to School-Age); staff numbers have increased to over 40; educators are required to have more training. And yet the Centre is still growing in scope, always driven, Ron says, by the needs of the community.

Being part of the male minority in the field of early childhood education can be very lonely, but there is a movement afoot to rectify that situation. In Manitoba, that movement – first envisioned when a certain male educator attended the World Forum in Montreal – is spearheaded by Ron Blatz. The experience of meeting other male early childhood educators from many countries around the globe opened Ron's eyes to new possibilities and to a new network of support for his male colleagues. Currently, he is passionate about providing men with the support they need to enter and continue to work in the field of early childhood education. In addition, Ron feels strongly that all children need

positive role models, both men and women, particularly since today's families face so many challenges. Not only do men provide different ways of implementing curriculum compared to that of women, but, in today's fractured world, children also need to see men and women working together with co-operation.

Ron says, "Sometimes what is in your heart, matters most." It appears that the experiences that filled Ron's heart during his childhood play in the out-of-doors on his family's farm, remain in his heart today. Ron's office is filled with items gleaned from the outdoors. When children visit, they are able to see and touch many artifacts of nature - birds, animals, and plant life that help them bridge the experiential gap between urban living and the natural world. In part, this is because Ron fervently believes that today's children have a deep need to be in touch with nature. While in attendance at the World Forum, his belief found both form and outlet. Upon his return home, Ron, along with other like-minded individuals, began the Manitoba branch of the Nature Action Collaboration for Children, (MNACC). Now a group of early childhood professionals, naturalists, landscape architects and parents meet regularly to share ideas and promote making nature education a part of children's daily lives. Their motto and mission is, "Leave No Child Inside".

How blessed families are to have a director who returns from conferences with a myriad of new ideas and helps his staff to implement them – all for the betterment of the centre and the children who are its reason for being. In Ron's centre, the largest ECE facility in Manitoba, this infusion of new ideas keeps programming fresh and produces positive and exciting outcomes for children, which Ron believes is what it's all about.

CAYC Manitoba is proud to nominate Ron Blatz as a recipient of the Friends of Children Award.