

Spotlight on Crestwood #5 What is Happening in Hopper Hall?

*Crestwood Childcare
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Ever since I returned to Crestwood, I've been itching to peek inside Hopper Hall. It is where my Sunday School class "The Lost and Found" met, where I was introduced to Jazzercise with Donna Barr, and where the cub scouts had their hot car races and their father/son cake bake sales some forty years ago.

Hopper Hall was the first building on the Crestwood Campus and served as the church's worship and meeting space until the sanctuary was built. It was named after Dr. Myron Hopper, a professor of religion at the seminary and a Central Christian member. It was his idea and inspiration that led to the formation of the new Crestwood congregation. After the sanctuary was built, Hopper Hall transitioned to an all-purpose building and has now become home to an active and successful Child Care Center.

When I was finally able to visit Hopper Hall, it frankly was unrecognizable. The large space is now divided into halls and classrooms for the eight different age levels. The high ceiling has been lowered. The freshly painted walls are cheery, covered with children's art work, and match the happy sounds coming from the rooms. There is a little pad-covered area for the very youngest to play, crawl, and roll. Cribs are in rooms at the end where the babies and toddlers are separated from the older boys and girls.

Each day, a hundred children ages 6 weeks to 6 years arrive as early as 6:30 am. The Center closes at 5:30 pm. In the summer they will be joined by more children, housed in the building's basement, for an innovative summer program that includes elementary-aged children. In the fall, an after-school program will again re-start, having been shut down by the Covid epidemic. The Center is approved to care for up to 138 youngsters.

On the day I visited, a busy buzz of activity could be heard from the hallway. In the nearby rooms, the children were busy cutting and pasting in one place, and playing with a house-keeping unit in another. I am told there is an established Christian-based curriculum, currently under revision. The goal is education within all their activities. Colorful cats with buttons, penguins promoting the fun wearing of masks, and a display about the 15 Acts of Kindness grace the hall walls.

I suspect the older children are especially drawn to the colorful playground at the side and rear of the long building. When I was there, they were enjoying each piece, clamoring over and up bars, and laughing as they played. If that had been available when my boys were young, I doubt I could have gotten them home! The play area is divided by fencing into four areas so that the various ages can play to their hearts' content without being bulldozed by the older children. Each group inside and out is watched over by a very diverse group of teachers – male and female, black and white – who give the students

valued exposure to a wide variety of role models.

The Child Care Center belongs to Crestwood but receives no direct funding from the church and is completely self-supporting. Profits are rolled back into the Center. They have a staff of 24, including a full-time cook. There is a full kitchen and a dining room where the children used to have meals, but since Covid, they have food brought to their rooms. Crestwood member and volunteer extraordinaire Rick Tittmann has just left the position of Chair of the Child Care Council but is still wearing a number of hats as he works with the center. He generously declares that Johan Graham, David Miller, Kyle Melloan, Matt Proud and Kory Wilcoxson have all put in a “tremendous number of hours” with the center along with others and insists I include their names if I use his.

According to Fran McKinney, church historian, the Child Care Center first opened in 1985 when the Crestwood Child Care Center addition was built (now the children’s wing). At that time, Central Baptist Church on Nicholasville Road had a well-respected childcare, pre-K, and kindergarten program where Judy Browning, wife of our associate minister John Browning, lovingly introduced my youngest son to the Letter People and the alphabet. At that time there was a long waiting list for families needing childcare in Lexington, and Crestwood decided to open their own childcare center as a needed service to the community. The Director of Central Baptist, Betty Morrison, moved to Crestwood as Director and helped get it get off to a successful start. In later years, Hopper Hall was renovated and the Child Care Center moved there.

The Center draws children from all around Lexington. The rates are competitive – even lower – than similar programs. A few children are on Commonwealth Assistance so the program is available to all.

Watch the area for upcoming improvements. A new playground surface will arrive this spring and the interior of Hopper Hall will continue to be improved. The director, Amber Combs, said they would welcome Crestwood members who would like to be involved with the center. Attendance at their performances will be welcome, she said, and “it would be nice to have church volunteers come over and read to the children during the day. They love story time and enjoy new faces in the classroom.”

I have gotten lost in the historical weeds, trying to piece together the various additions and time frames, but I’m fascinated at how much things have changed since my family grew up here. It’s just been a blink of an eye it seems, but so much good has been done. Crestwood’s community commitment continues to grow.

If there is some area of the church you would like to know more about, please share your ideas with me. Let’s explore together.

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