

**Eastern Suffolk BOCES provides educational services that transform lives...**

- **Ms. Celine Castella, Eastern Suffolk BOCES Early Childhood Education program (ECE) graduate from the Edward J. Milliken Technical Center**



*"I owe my future to Eastern Suffolk BOCES," said Celine Castella, a graduate working at Tutor Time.*

Working as a teaching assistant in a class of seven little ones, aged 18 months to three years, means always being upbeat, repeatedly baby-proofing the environment, and making sure the love of learning blossoms. These are easy tasks for Celine Castella, at Tutor Time Child Care Learning Center in East Setauket, because she loves her job.

The Eastern Suffolk BOCES graduate of the Early Childhood Education program says she has the best job in the world; an occupation where every day a child says, "I love you." Her story begins, however, on a rocky path due to a head trauma from a childhood fall. Overcoming that has added to her self-esteem and directed her on the smooth path of preparing children for the future. "It's my passion, actually," she said recently to a visitor. "I love being with the little ones."

While in her sophomore year at Ward Melville High School in Three Village CSD, her guidance counselor spoke about the ECE classes available through Eastern Suffolk BOCES. The half-day course, five days a week, is for high school juniors and seniors who are serious about the responsibility and knowledge required to work with, and safely supervise, youngsters as a profession, she told her. In addition, by enrolling as an ESBOCES student for her junior year, the hands-on experience would confirm that this is what she is meant to do after graduation. Celine and her dad visited the ESBOCES Islip Career Center (ICC) in Oakdale, "and we liked what we saw," she told her friends and family. During her junior year in ECE with teacher Bette Ann Stark, the 11<sup>th</sup>-grader knew this was "the right field" for her.

The ECE program is designed to prepare students for careers as teachers or childcare providers. The study of child development is coordinated with direct work experience with three- and four-year-olds in a pre-school laboratory. This course is for high school juniors and seniors who are serious about the responsibility and knowledge required to successfully work with and safely supervise children.

During the first year of the course, child growth and development is studied, along with planning and organizing the learning environment, guidance and discipline, and health

and safety. The second year focuses on classroom management and supervision, parental relationship, equipment and supplies, and preparing for CDA (Child Development Associate) certification. CDA is a nationally recognized credential that requires 480 hours of practical experience in a licensed facility, 120 hours of classroom instruction, and a rigorous assessment process. Students are eligible to receive their CDA credentials upon their 18th birthday, successful completion of the assessment process, and receipt of their high school diploma.

While in ESBOCES classes, Celine made lifelong friends and says she highly recommends the agency for those who want to be sure of their chosen profession before they head to college, or if they want to jumpstart their careers. Instructor Bette Ann Stark recently said of Celine, "She persevered and overcame personal and school related obstacles. She worked hard and was eager to graduate to begin working with children. She is a lovely, caring, nurturing young woman who is dedicated to her job at Tutor Time."

Today, at age 20, Celine is working full-time at Tutor Time in East Setauket. She is planning to enroll at Suffolk County Community College for the fall semester where she will work towards a degree in Early Childhood Education and her goal of becoming an early childhood education teacher. Her joy is obvious as she begins to read to her charges before naptime, a book that is one of their favorites, *Good Night Moon*. Later she sings to them, "The Wheels on the Bus Go Round and Round." The match between Celine and Tutor Time is perfect as both prepare children to become lifelong learners.

Tutor Time Director Jennifer O'Leary reports that a permanent position was offered after Celine had volunteered at the center. "She's a pleasure," she commented. "She's a good worker, very reliable, excels with toddler groups, and she's always happy to be here."

The parents of her charges seem to agree; many of whom regularly give her thank you cards. "It's so nice when they tell me how appreciative they are," Celine added. Meanwhile, those walking through the hall could hear, "And the wipers on the bus go swish, swish, swish. Swish, swish, swish. Swish, swish, swish. The wipers on the bus go swish, swish, swish, all through the town."

The ECE program is available at the following ESBOCES sites: Brookhaven Technical Center in Bellport, 286-6538; Islip Career Center in Oakdale, 244-5800; and the H.B. Ward Technical & Academic Center in Riverhead, 369-8100.