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Bigham Knoll

Brooke Ashland is making plans for a preschool at Bigham Knoll, the original name given the property now referred to as Cascade Christian or the Old School. "I know I may be premature," she admits, "since we don't own the space yet. But if we don't own it, we'll rent it. Cascade Christian is moving to their new campus."

She plans to call the preschool the Bigham Knoll Early Age Enhancements Center. "It's not daycare," Brooke emphasizes. "I have this philosophy that home is your center of learning. A preschool's role is to enhance opportunities, not to teach the basics. Many of these kids will come knowing things like their colors. We'll try to put opportunities in front of them that they don't have at home."

Some of these opportunities will include classes in Mandarin Chinese and Spanish. "I believe in language, language, language—there's nothing more important than good communication. On Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, we will have Mandarin Chinese classes. On Tuesday and Thursday, we will have Spanish.

"These will be total immersion classes first thing in the morning for 30 minutes when they are fresh and able to focus on learning vocabulary. Thirty minutes is not a lot of time, but it's a lot of instruction for a child. I'm hoping that parents will set up learning groups so the kids can continue on their own—kids need to see their peer group speaking the language."

Brooke is also making plans for art and music classes. "These are my two favorites. Children are natural dancers. They love to sing; they love movement. We'll furnish the pianos, but I need the teacher."

The school will pay its teachers professional rates, and Brooke is hoping potential teachers will contact her. "These teachers are going to be tapped into our company so we can offer things like health benefits. Right now what we have are the facilities."

In the meantime, she has been exploring different music franchises in the valley. "Most of them are non-performance based. I think one of the most important things that a young

child can learn from a music program is to get up on stage and sing out loud. We all need the confidence to be able to get up and speak in front of groups. Music and movement are a great way for the kids to learn it."

Brooke also plans to incorporate historic themes into many of the center's offering. "We're on this fabulous site—it's historic, and that historic theme is going to prevail. For example, if they're painting trees, we can add parents' names, grandparents' names, and the names of other family members on that tree and create a family tree.

"This will be an old fashioned pre-school," she underscores. "There will be no television sets, no computers. There is all this open space so they can play games; they can run. There is an 'easy defense' area outside that will allow them to paint in the park, to feed the bunny."

Brooke also intends for the school to be faith based. "We will be free to share concepts like 'one nation under God.'"

Lest someone think Brooke's plans are simply based on a personal vision, it's important to know that this Cutler Investment Group Chief Executive Officer has a degree in early childhood education from UCLA.

"We have a young demographic moving into Jacksonville," she states. "We need to have an early childhood focus."

Brooke has plans for seniors as well. "We have a room set aside in the school for senior activities. It's currently the science lab. It's adjacent to the cafeteria. It has its own entrance and is handicapped accessible. It also has its own lockers. Service clubs who want to use that area could lock their stuff in the lockers."

She continues, "It will be right next to the pre-school. I like to see the different ages all mashed together.

"I think the philosophy of Bigham Knoll should be very pleasing to John Bigham." In 1867, Bigham donated Bigham Knoll to Jacksonville for a school. "Our motto for Bigham Knoll is 'where the past meets the future.'"

For additional information about the Bigham Knoll Early Age Enhancements Center or about teaching positions, contact Brooke Ashland at 770-9000 or e-mail brooke@cutler.com.