



*Front row, left to right, Bruce Hayes, senior business specialist, and Jane Shelton, secretary, Knoxville SBDC, Pellissippi State; Randy and Rosemary Overton, owners, the Goddard School; and Teri Brahams, executive director, Business and Community Services, Pellissippi State. Back row, left to right: Joe Andrews, senior business specialist, and Larry Rossini, director, Knoxville SBDC, Pellissippi State; Patrick Geho, state director, TSBDC; Jacqueline Merritt, business opportunity specialist, U.S. Small Business Administration; and John Garnett, executive director, Tennessee Child Care Facilities Corporation.*

## Farragut preschool wins TSBDC Rising Star Award

Learning how to open a new school can be an education in itself, especially if you're at the beginning of the proverbial "learning curve."

That's what happened when Rosemary and Randy Overton decided to leave their careers and lifestyle in Chicago to enter the field of preschool education in the town of Farragut.

The newest kid on the education block in West Knoxville, the Goddard School for Early Childhood Development opened in February 2007, thanks in part to the Overtons' decision to enlist the help of the Tennessee Small Business Development Center.

The school's accomplishments, from startup to launch, recently earned the Overtons TSBDC's 2008 Rising Star Award.

The TSBDC is a statewide network of professional business centers, each of them offering free assistance to entrepreneurs who want to start a business and to owners of existing

small businesses who want to expand.

"Each year, the Rising Star Award is given by the TSBDC network to a small-business client in each region of the state in recognition of the business' perseverance and success," said Larry Rossini, director of the Knoxville TSBDC office, which is administered by Pellissippi State Technical Community College.

"We are proud of what the Overtons have achieved in the Knoxville community during the past two years," he said. "They brought a lot of business savvy with them, and we are pleased to have been a part of their new venture."

Randy had worked as vice president for a major sporting goods company for 30 years, and Rosemary had experience as an auditor and as vice president/controller for a major retailer in men's clothing. Having lived and worked mostly in large markets like Atlanta and Chicago, the Overtons decided to begin the second

phase of their careers by launching a business near Rosemary's hometown of Knoxville.

"Obviously, we had business experience," said Randy, "so our next step was to research several types of businesses to see what would be the most interesting and rewarding to us and the people of West Knoxville."

After working with a number of advisors and doing personal research for nearly a year, the couple learned about the Goddard School for Early Childhood Development.

"Goddard is the leader in franchised preschool

child development centers," Randy said. "We offer a high-quality experience for children, and all of our teachers meet stringent Goddard certification requirements. Most of our instructors have four-year degrees, and all possess a willingness to implement the Goddard programs in a respectful environment."

Goddard Systems, Inc. was named the top child-care franchise in the U.S. by Entrepreneur magazine for the seventh consecutive year in 2008 and one of the top 200 franchise systems in worldwide sales in October 2007 by Franchise

**Continue on page 4**

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## **Cont. from page 2**

Times. The Farragut location was the company's first in Tennessee.

"The Goddard business model," said Rosemary, "is geared toward prospective owners who typically have a business background and can manage the financial, marketing and operations side, while the school's director, faculty and staff focus on the needs of the children." Each franchise is independently owned.

The couple purchased theirs in 2006 and immediately began to assess their needs and identify local resources to guide them through the maze of business planning, from being franchise holders to becoming owners/operators of their own school.

"One of the key resources we discovered was the Tennessee Small Business Development Center," said Randy, "so we called and made an appointment with Joe Andrews, a business specialist, who helped refine our business plan. It was a daunting task for us, because our previous expe-

rience had been creating and implementing corporate budgets and operational guidelines for large companies."

"The TSBDC provided us with various sources to research vital areas such as loan structures, construction costs and insurance needs," said Rosemary. "These sources were invaluable in helping us obtain and implement cost-efficient operational processes."

Finally, on February 5, 2007, the Overtons' dream was realized, when the state-of-the-art facility at 125 Loudoun Road opened. The 8,000-square-foot building consists of nine classrooms that serve children ranging from 6 weeks old through pre-kindergarten age.

The Goddard School's daily resource programs introduce children to foreign languages, art history, sign language, fitness, nutrition, music appreciation and yoga. Teachers work with infants on sensory stimulation, cognitive development

and motor skills.

"Our emphasis is on structure and a nurturing environment," Randy said.

Enrollment increased throughout the year as a result of the Overtons' planned marketing efforts and word-of-mouth advertising.

"We conducted direct-mail campaigns, did radio spots, spoke to local civil and community groups, developed a Web site and circulated fliers to spread the word," Randy said.

After one year of operation, the Goddard School has an enrollment of 150 children and a full-time staff of 28.

"Support from the community has been phenomenal," said Rosemary. "We're pretty much at capacity. Parents want quality programs and safety for their children, and we are available on site every day to ensure we meet those expectations with the best possible learning experience."

The Overtons both agree, the most rewarding aspect of operating the school is the daily interaction with

parents and children and meeting their expectations.

"We started out as business owners, but watching the children grow and learn has become emotionally gratifying as well."

The business owners say they are most appreciative of the continuing relationship with the TSBDC: "They have provided ongoing follow up calls and meetings to make sure our plans have met expectations and we are progressing in a profitable manner."

"Pellissippi State participates in the TSBDC network as part of its mission to support economic and community development," said Teri Brahams, executive director of Business and Community Services at the college. "Most of our services are available at little or no cost to any business owner or entrepreneur in the TSBDC area."

For more information, visit the TSBDC Web site at [knoxvillesbdc.org](http://knoxvillesbdc.org) or call (865) 246-2663.