New center named for Rita O’Brien Dee

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Tewksbury resident Rita O’Brien Dee, surrounded by friends, family, and colleagues, was honored by Community Teamwork in Lowell for her half century of service to the organization. The Rita O’Brien Dee Center for Behavioral Health & Development will be a resource for Community Teamwork and providers across the community who are working with children with behavioral, emotional, and developmental challenges.                                                                                                              (Paige Impink photo)

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TEWKSBURY — She thought she was attending a board meeting to accept a donation from a supporter of Community Teamwork, a vital services organization she works with in Lowell. But, when Rita O’Brien Dee saw her face on colorful t-shirts and friends and family under a festive tent, she realized something else was go­ing on.

Community Teamwork CEO Karen Frederick wel­comed O’Brien Dee and explained the surprise.

“We’d like to welcome Rita and acknowledge more than a half century of service to the community, and to the Commu­nity Teamwork family by dedicating The Rita O’Bri­en Dee Center for Behavioral Health & De­velopment,” said Freder­ick.

Through a generous anonymous donation and a subsequent grant from the Greater Lowell Com­munity Foundation, Com­munity Teamwork was able to establish the program, located at the James Houlares Center on Phoenix Avenue in Lowell. The center will be the headquarters for programs and services that promote healthy social-emotional development for children, in­crease children’s success in school, strengthen children and families, and mitigate adversity through trauma-inform­ed care.

According to Child and Family Services Division Director Meghan Siem­bor, “This opportunity could not have come at a better time… This opportunity enables us to meet a critical need and ad­dress a significant public health issue — children’s mental and behavioral health.”

Siembor praised O’Brien Dee.

“Her love for children is unparalleled as is her passion for giving back to the community,” said Siembor. “It truly is an honor for me and the staff across the Division of Child and Family ser­vices to be able to develop this Center in her hon­or.”

O’Brien Dee was visibly moved.

O’Brien Dee has been involved with Commu­nity Teamwork for 56 years. As a single parent raising five children on her own, she faced difficult struggles trying to work, put food on the table, and keep a roof over the heads of her family.

O’Brien Dee started her career as a teacher aide at Head Start, and earned her Associate’s Degree and quickly be­came an early childhood teacher at the center. O’Brien Dee was in the classroom for 27 years.

Upon retirement, O’Bri­en Dee joined the Head Start Policy Council and Community Teamwork’s Board of Directors. O’Bri­en Dee is also a member of many CTI committees and supports numerous initiatives.

According to data collected by CTI, mental health has emerged as a prominent community need, jumping from the fourth-most cited community need to the second-most cited need from the prior survey cycles. The impact of the pandemic is notable.

Key information also points to mental health as the most pressing is­sue in the community behind the need for better housing, according to CTI’s data for the great­er Lowell community.

O’Brien Dee is known in Tewksbury for her participation in the Friends of the Library, the Tewksbury Historical Society, and is an active member of the Tewks­bury Senior Center, Gar­den Club, the Democra­tic Town Committee, and is a former election wor­ker.

O’Brien Dee has been an inspiration and example of giving back to the community, not just in Tewksbury, but in the greater Merrimack Val­ley.

If you would like to donate to help support the new Rita O’Brien Dee Center for Behavior­al Health & Develop­ment, please contribute to the Greater Lowell Family Foundation c/o The Rita O’Brien Dee Center for Behavioral Health and Development