

Private charter elementary plans to emphasize reading skill

BY MARILYN BOWDEN

A private charter elementary school opening next August in Overtown, across the street from Miami Rescue Mission, will emphasize reading skills and Christian values.

In addition to providing services for the homeless, Miami Rescue Mission has since 2002 hosted after-school care programs and summer camps for local children in its Community Activity Center, said Marty Steinberger, coordinator for the READ ON Miami literacy program and now president of CARE Elementary School, a not for profit 501(c) (3) corporation. CARE is an acronym for Christian Academy for Reaching Excellence.

"Through its literacy initiative in the after-school program," she said, "Miami Rescue Mission became aware of the reading struggles of many of the children who attend the program.

"When the Community Activity Center building became available, the decision was made by the Miami Rescue Mission Board of Directors that having a school of excellence dedicated to literacy would best serve the community."

While, as a charter school, CARE will focus on literacy as a path to academic excellence, said Director and Principal Chris Simmonds, as a private school, "we can promote Christian values, which no other school in the community can do. We will also provide parental support." For example, he said, Wells Fargo will present financial literacy programs for parents and students.

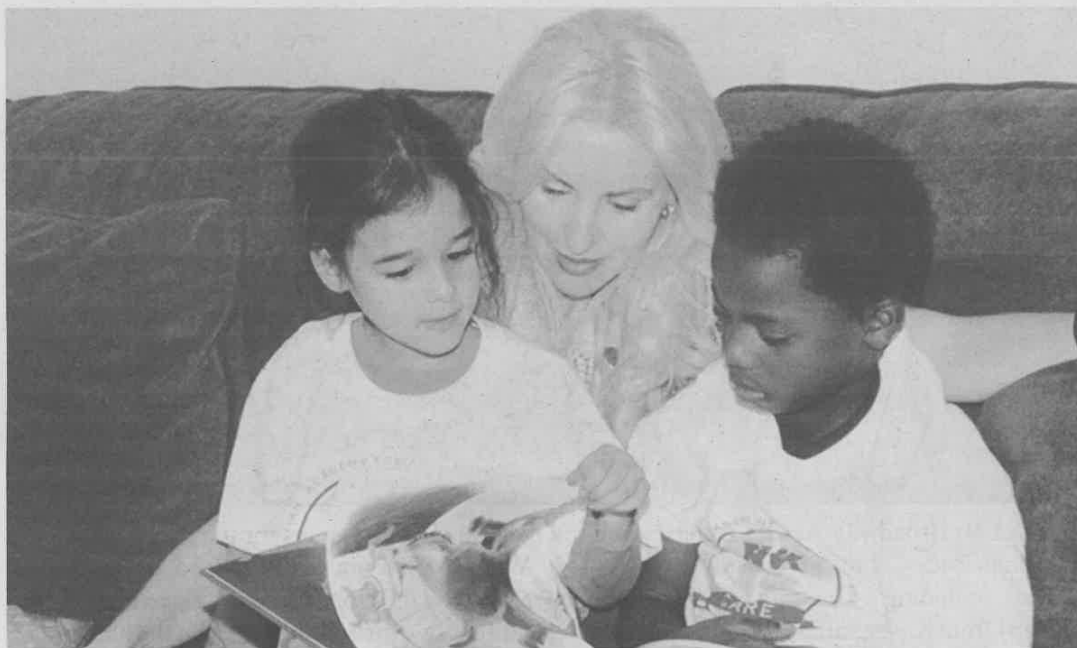
The school, which will begin with grades K-3 and later expand, plans for small classes of about 20 students, he said, with a teacher and a teacher's aide in every class.

"This allows for a closer, more monitored approach," Mr. Simmonds said. Though private school students are not obligated to take state or national assessment tests, he said, CARE will administer them, "but we will not be content just to train them to pass a test. We favor a conceptual learning approach."

Student will have personal computers, he said, and will be able to supplement classroom teaching with a technological component that lets them move forward at their own pace.

Since enrollment opened Feb. 1, said Mr. Simmonds, CARE has signed up 71 students. "There's still room in all grades," he said. "We have a target of between 90 and 120, and we will accept children up until capacity reached. After that, we'll have a waiting list."

The US Census Bureau's most recent American Community Survey estimates median income in Overtown at \$21,250, among the lowest in the city. Mr. Simmonds said for most families, State of Florida Step-Up Scholarships – income-based tax credits – will cover all tuition costs; for the rest, "we will pay whatever is not paid."



Katrina Peebles, who helps in Miami Rescue Mission's after-school program, fosters a love of reading.

Sponsors are helping with the initial operating budget of \$600,000, he said; about half that has been raised so far.

"The school's board of directors and Friends of CARE

are working hard to provide the additional resources needed to make this great opportunity possible," Ms. Steinberger said.

Peebles Corp., for example, is sponsoring a first-grade class.

Katrina Peebles, wife of developer R. Donahue Peebles, joined Friends of Care after getting involved in Miami Rescue Mission's after-school care programs.

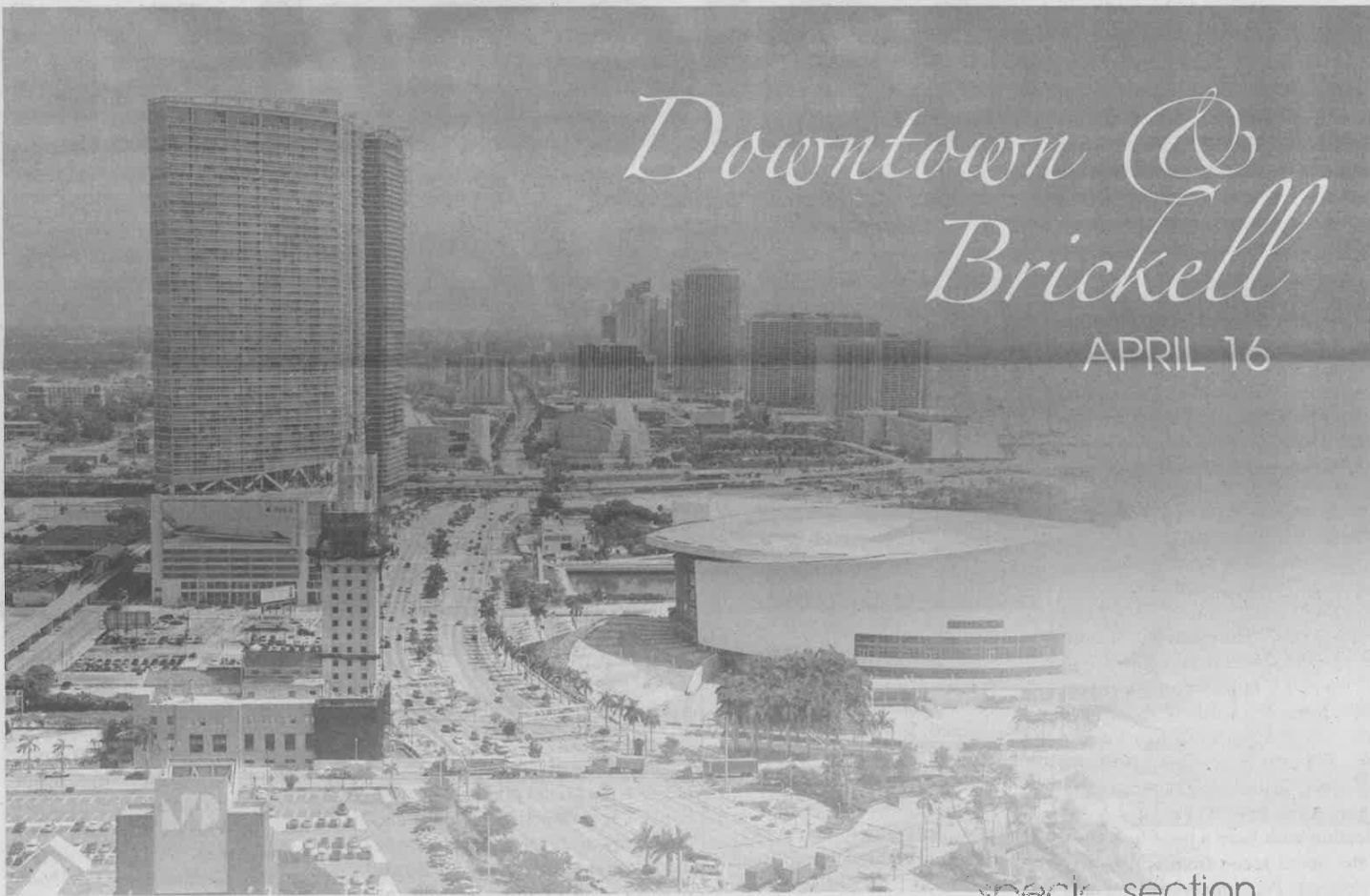
"I and some of our employ-

ees go there for reading and mentoring programs," Ms. Peebles said. "We read to the kids and try to foster a love of reading."

Mr. Peebles said re-investing in the community by providing opportunities for students is a focus of The Peebles Corp. "It's a much easier thing to prepare young people for the future than to try to correct the educational system," he said. "CARE is a transformational school that will put people on the right path academically so that they can compete. That is something we as a company will get more into. I hope this will be a long association with our community."

Ms. Steinberger said Amtrust, the Anthony Abraham Foundation and Withers Worldwide Transportation are other major donors, "as well as several major contributors who would like to remain anonymous."

Details: (305) 572-2072 or www.careelementary.org.



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