

Published: July 27, 2007 6:00 a.m.

# ***Montessori says farewell***

## ***Celebration marks last day downtown for MLK preschool***

**By Kelly Soderlund**

**The Journal Gazette**

Teachers and students at Martin Luther King Montessori School could see the heavy equipment in the distance Thursday, knowing their building would soon be at its mercy.

The equipment was about a block away, there to demolish Belmont Liquor Store to make way for the Harrison Square project. The downtown Montessori will meet the same fate in about a month to clear a city block for the downtown improvement project that includes a city-owned baseball stadium, a Courtyard by Marriott hotel with parking garage, retail shops and condominiums.

"It's just very sad," MLK director Mary Musson said about the upcoming demolition.

The school, 333 W. Lewis St., had a closing party Thursday to commemorate the last day at the school, complete with a clown, activities and barbecue for teachers, parents and students. It was also a chance for the students to have their way with the building.

Because the structure will soon be rubble, teachers had no qualms about letting students write on the windows, sidewalks and side of the building to make their last mark. In fact, it was encouraged.

The school will reopen for 100 students at Village Elementary School, 4625 Werling Drive, in the East Allen County Schools district, Aug. 20 for 3- to 5-year-olds. The kindergarten program will be eliminated because Village already serves kindergarten students.

"I had to go find another school, and I hate it," parent Zelda Nelson said. "I like the Montessori program. I like the way they do things with kids and the simple things that you can pull out of your kitchen at home to teach your children arithmetic."

Montessori education is known for its hands-on learning style that encourages students to move at their own pace and explore on their own. Some MLK parents were able to enroll their children in Bunche Elementary School, which teaches Montessori, but others will have to send students to regular elementary schools.

"I know everything has to change, but I'm very disappointed," said parent JaCole Hornaday, whose daughter Deja Eley will attend kindergarten at Lindley Elementary School this year. "It's a lovely school."

The relocation is just the beginning of changes for MLK officials. The school had to cut its enrollment from nearly 130 students to 100 to accommodate for a smaller space, along with paying \$5,684 a month in rent to EACS.

The new rent won't put that much of a strain on the school's finances, since it spent around that much for maintenance, which EACS will take care of at the new location, said Martha Booker, assistant director.

MLK moved into its Lewis Street location in 2004 when Lincoln Financial donated the building free of charge. Before then, the program was housed in three different churches and in various places around Fort Wayne for decades before that.

"You never get used to it," Booker said. "I've been around long enough to help move at least (five times)."

MLK will have an auction at 10 a.m. Wednesday to get rid of furniture and classroom supplies, among other items in the building. Then school officials will begin packing up and moving needed items to the new site.

An opening celebration at Village will be from 4 to 6 p.m. Aug. 17 and classes begin Aug. 20.

ksoderlund@jg.net