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FOR RELEASE MONDAY, FEBRUARY 19, 2018

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GROWTH MAKES CDC A TOP 10 EMPLOYER IN VENANGO COUNTY

200-plus employees now staff 12 centers with more than 1,000 children enrolled

Responsibility for the federal and state Head Start programs pushed Child Development Centers' enrollment past 1,000 in 2017, and the organization's growth has made it a top 10 employer for the first time in Venango County.

The non-profit CDC now employs almost 210 persons who provide child care and early childhood education at 12 sites, including eight in Venango County and four in Crawford County.

CDC has enrolled about 430 three-, four- and five-year-old boys and girls since taking over the Head Start programs in late 2016 in the two counties, and its growing student population has prompted the organization to hire about 70 teachers, assistant teachers and others to staff Head Start classrooms, according to Chief Executive Officer Rina Irwin. CDC's increasing work force has vaulted it all the way to seventh place among Venango County employers, according to the Pennsylvania Department of Labor's most recent quarterly census of employment and wages.

In view of the troubling developments that the local economy has experienced in recent months – the loss of jobs at Komatsu Mining Corp. (the former Joy Global), the closings of J.C. Penney Co., Sears and the pending shutdown of Kmart, among others – CDC's growth is refreshing news.

“We're creating jobs for college-educated teachers and others, and we're providing a high-quality early learning experience that we hope will prepare children for a successful transition to kindergarten, elementary school and eventually their careers that follow,” Irwin said. “Some CDC alumni now are engineers, airline pilots and chefs, we know, and one is a Head Start teacher in one of our centers, so

we like to think that we're achieving our educational mission, and that we're making a meaningful contribution to the economy here and elsewhere.”

Here is more of what CDC achieved in 2017 and what it foresees for 2018:

Expanded Facilities – CDC acquired three buildings in 2017 to help welcome its fast-growing population of young learners:

Former DuBois Business College – The organization bought this Oil City building (which also had been Grant Street Elementary School), completed some renovations and reopened it as Grant Street Child Development Center. The building houses all six of CDC's Oil City area Head Start classrooms, with enrollment currently at about 100.

Former Seventh Street Elementary School – CDC is purchasing this facility from Franklin Area School District, and all five of its Franklin area Head Start classes are housed here. Enrollment currently is almost 100, and the building can accommodate more classrooms if the need arises.

Former Meadville Elks Lodge – The organization acquired this building from the Meadville Elks and is converting it into a child care and early childhood learning center with nine classrooms, including two each for infants, toddlers and preschoolers, and three for Head Start/preschool. Two Head Start classrooms already are open in the structure, which CDC has named Willow Child Development Center, with the rest tentatively set to open in February.

Educational Grant – CDC in 2017 obtained a one-year, \$408,000 grant to operate Pennsylvania's Head Start Supplemental Assistance Program (HSSAP) in Venango County. This funding, which CDC secured for the second straight year, provides a Head Start education for 40 preschool-age children who are enrolled at the organization's Grant Street center in Oil City.

Preschool Enrollment – With about 670 children enrolled in its preschool classrooms in Venango and Crawford Counties, CDC is reaching more families than ever with high-quality pre-kindergarten

education programs. Among these young learners are about 390 in the federal Head Start program, 40 in state Head Start (HSSAP), 190 in Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts, and 50 in CDC's private preschool.

CDC in 2017 graduated a record 350 preschool students who now occupy kindergarten classrooms in local schools, and research suggests that many of these boys and girls will greatly benefit from their early learning experience in CDC classrooms. According to a study published in the online journal *Science*, a high-quality preschool education produces significant long-term benefits including higher academic achievement, increased high school graduation rates and college attendance, better jobs with higher pay, and fewer problem behaviors.

Marks of Excellence – Several of CDC's Head Start centers earned Star 4 ratings in 2017 from Pennsylvania's Keystone STARS educational quality improvement initiative. Venango County sites that achieved Star 4 ratings – the highest that Keystone STARS gives – are Grant Street Child Development Center in Oil City, Seventh Street Head Start in Franklin, and Clintonville Head Start.

CDC's five other centers in Venango County – Cranberry, Franklin, Franklin School-Age, Hasson Heights and Oil City – also have Star 4 ratings, and four of these centers (all but Franklin School-Age) are accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). Only on small fraction of Pennsylvania's 8,500 regulated child care providers – less than three percent – have achieved both Star 4 ratings and NAEYC accreditation.

Playground Upgrades – One feature that distinguishes CDC is the high-quality outdoor play facilities that its centers provide. The organization built new playgrounds the past year at its Grant Street center in Oil City and Seventh Street center in Franklin, and upgraded play facilities at most of its six other sites in Venango County.

The kid-friendly playgrounds include some combination of high-quality climbing/sliding structures, playhouses, gazebos, swings, tunnels, ball facilities, benches and tables, and other challenges

and amusements.

Another noteworthy component is soft, durable artificial turf that has greatly improved the appearance of the play areas and makes them much safer than would grass or other natural surfaces. The fast-drying, low-maintenance turf allows children to resume playing minutes after rainfall, maximizing play time and eliminating grass- and dirt-stained clothing and shoes that often result from activities on natural surfaces. Strong vinyl privacy fencing also is part of the playground improvements.

Children's Health – CDC greatly advanced its health care capabilities in 2017 with the addition of board certified pediatrician Scott Cartwright, MD, as Chief Medical Officer (CMO). Child health initiatives that CDC has launched since Dr. Cartwright's arrival include the application of fluoride varnish to preschool children's teeth to help strengthen and protect them from cavities and decay; an agreement with the Salvation Army Dental Center in Oil City to obtain annual on-site exams and cleanings for hundreds of CDC children who need these services; to help protect children's health, a requirement that CDC employees obtain flu and whooping cough vaccinations, and; performance of anemia and lead screenings on all children enrolled in CDC's Head Start program.

The doctor's presence, along with that of CDC's part-time registered nurse, "is positioning CDC better than ever to manage the health and well-being of our enrolled children," Irwin said. "We know of no other child care or early childhood learning organization in our region that has everyday access to an on-site doctor and nurse to help support children and families."

Grant Funding – CDC continues to enjoy a reputation among local and regional grant-making organizations as a trustworthy destination for grant funding. Grantors whose funds supported CDC in 2017 are the PNC Charitable Trusts (Samuel and Edith Justus Charitable Trust and Elizabeth S. Black Charitable Trust), the Dr. and Mrs. Arthur William Phillips Charitable Trust, and the Pittsburgh-based Edith L. Trees Charitable Trust.

State and federal agencies from whom CDC currently receives grant funding are the Office of Child Development and Early Learning (OCDEL), which is part of the Pennsylvania Departments of Education and Human Services (Pre-K Counts and HSSAP funding); and the Administration for Children & Families, which is part of the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services (Head Start funding).

Lunch Time – CDC served more than 21,600 meals (about 380/day) during its Lunch Time summer nutrition outreach in 2017. Offering the program for the ninth straight year, the organization provided a hot lunch every weekday all summer at two of its centers and at seven schools, churches, playgrounds and other sites in Oil City, Franklin and Cooperstown.

Lunch Time is intended to make a nutritious midday meal available to students when school is out, to help families whose children lose free and reduced-price breakfast and lunch benefits during summer, and to extend nutrition to children who aren't yet old enough to attend school.

The federal Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) and CDC fund Lunch Time, which is open to any child up to age 18 who wishes to participate, Irwin said.

Sites and other information for CDC's 2018 lunch program will be announced in the spring.