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## Community Center undergoes Renovations

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Allie Hartwick  
 Posted by: Jennifer Stauffer

The Belle Center was once only a place for children to come shoot hoops and hang out with their friends. A grant awarded to the community in 2003 allowed the center to undergo major renovations. The Belle Center has since blossomed into a resource for the entire community. Executive Director, Nestor Hernandez has worked hard since 2006 to transform the Belle Center into a place for children to learn and the community to grow.

Hernandez said "Our goal is to change people's mindsets of the Belle Center. In the past it's always been a recreational place, recreation is more of a catalyst now"

The center provides a daycare program for newborns to pre-school age, as well as after school programs for children in Kindergarten, through High School. The center is working to begin educational activities at an early age that continue through adolescence and into adulthood. Many programs at the center involve parents as well as children, in hopes to continue the learning process and extend it beyond the center walls and into the community.

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The center also offers help with homework, exercises in character development, art programs, fitness activities and skills classes including home improvement. One program the Belle Center is heavily involved with is Buffalo AmeriCorps. Through AmeriCorps individuals are given the opportunity to work with the community through the Belle Center and emerge as leaders. AmeriCorps has been working with the Belle Center for years, but services continue to be added to the regular programs. New features of the Center's catalog are the GED and English as a Second Language classes. These courses can help adults looking to continue their education. Daycare employee Betzaida Rodriguez has experienced the benefit of these educational programs first-hand. Besides working and caring for her children, Rodriguez is earning a degree in Early Childhood Education. Ms. Rodriguez is a single mother. Her two daughters are in the school-age program, while she works in the daycare center as one of their many bi-lingual care providers.

Rodriguez said "Its very amazing. I really like what I do. I just love seeing the kids every morning with that big smile."

Rodriguez will earn her degree in hopes of advancing her place in the career she enjoys so much. She believes that with the continued support of the Belle Center, she and her daughters can continue to succeed.