

Small Business Success Awards 2004

**Raritan Valley Community College SBDC
Winner: Mary Matthews and Dr. Margaret Buley
Business: Stellar Academy
575 Route 202/206
Bridgewater**



908-252-1166

Nestled in the Township of Bridgewater is one of New Jersey's premier childcare learning centers. Stellar Academy is owned and operated by Mary Matthews, who serves as the Business Director, and her sister Dr. Margaret Buley, who serves as the Education Director. In September of 2002, Ms. Matthews attended the NJEDA Entrepreneurial Training Institute (ETI) program hosted by the Small Business Development Center (SBDC) at Raritan Valley Community College (RVCC). SBDC Director, Sue Johnson, was a facilitator for the program and assisted Matthews with developing her business, marketing and financial plans.

After completing the ETI program Matthews and Dr. Buley followed up with Johnson and worked with the RVCC SBDC to secure a SBA loan worth \$575,000 from Valley National Bank.

With the essential funding and after a year of careful planning, they opened for business in September of 2004. Expecting a gradual climb in attendance, Stellar Academy blossomed quickly to 130 children - 80% of the Academy's operating capacity—and full capacity could be reached within the first year of operation.

Stellar Academy's 16,000 square foot facility is sectioned into learning zones: The Louvre, nurtures a child's imagination and artistic abilities; The Olympics, emphasizes balance and body control; Carnegie Hall, where children are immersed in music; Alphabet Soup, focuses on language and word skills; NASA (Numbering and Sequencing Activities) concentrates on problem solving and categorizing; The UN (Understanding Neighbors) teaches people skills; Me, Myself & I nurtures self-confidence, safety and good nutrition; and The Discovery Zone, allows children to experience the wonders of nature. Each of these zones is staffed by a teacher specialist who works with Dr. Buley to develop and deliver the appropriate curriculum for that zone. Caregivers accompany their group of students to each learning zone. They are responsible for the physical and emotional needs of their children. To meet the teaching and support requirements of the many well-crafted learning programs/activities, Stellar Academy employs 27 full time and 10 part-time professionals.



Raritan Valley SBDC Director Sue Johnson with her center's winners Mary Matthews and Dr. Margaret Buley of Stellar Academy in Bridgewater. The sisters received a membership in the Somerset County Chamber of Commerce.