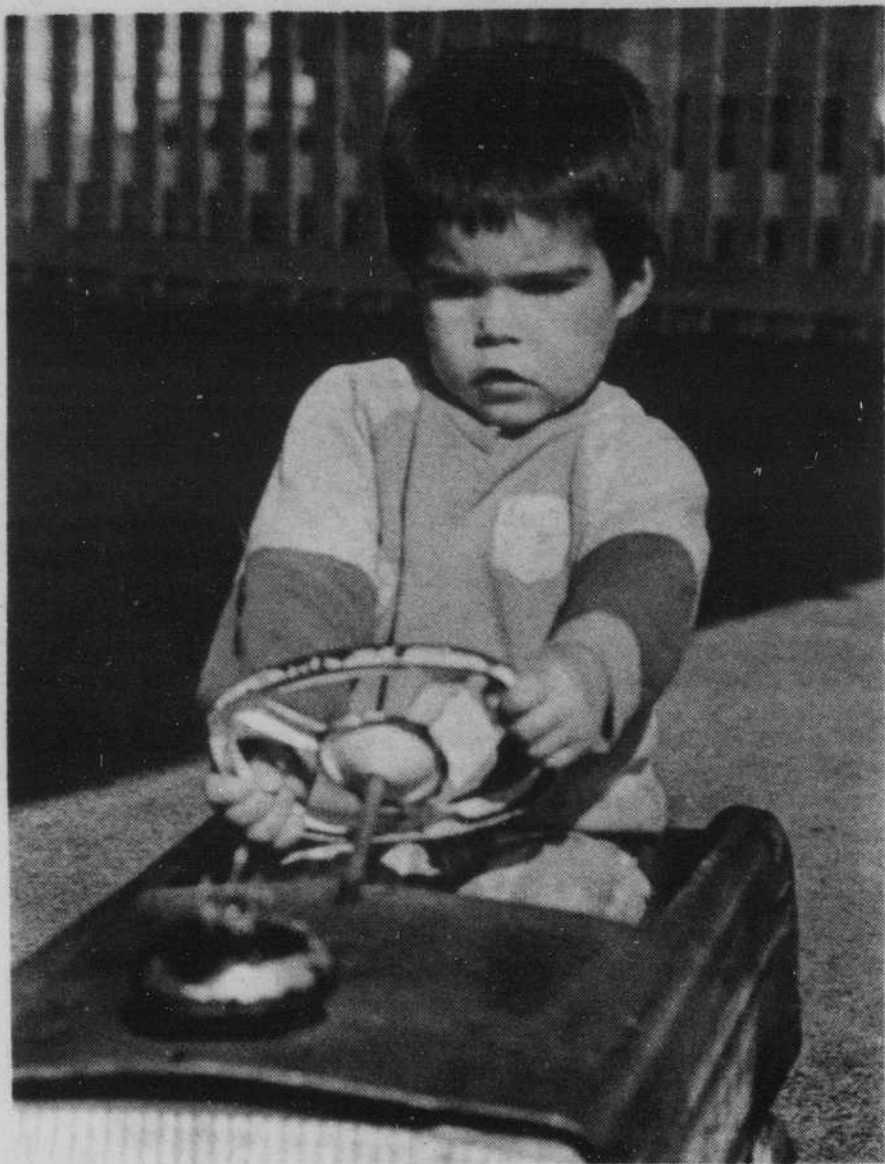




Young Daniel is one of 10 children who now enjoys the space Amazon Day Care Center provides its residents who are between two and a half and six and a half years old.

Photo by Patrick Sullivan

ACT opens day-care center

Resident parents take part in decision-making

By KELI OSBORN
Of the Emerald

The Amazon Cooperative Tenants have expanded their business concerns beyond bake sales with the opening of a day-care center at the Amazon Family Housing project.

ACT had sought sponsorship of a day-care center by the University student housing office in the past, according to ACT secretary Nurit Steinfeld, but members decided this summer to establish their own cooperative center.

"There's been a lot of talk about getting day-care at Amazon, but nothing's been done for years," Steinfeld says.

With encouragement from project director Willy Hart, ACT members met in June to begin planning for the day-care center, Steinfeld says.

Hart and several tenants first negotiated with a parents' group for space previously allocated to

an Amazon nursery school in operation for about the last 15 years.

Hart also arranged for use of an apartment attached to the nursery school, thus giving the day-care center enough space to qualify for state certification.

But interest in the day-care center apparently waned as the summer months passed, Steinfeld says.

"I think everyone got cold feet — it seemed like something we couldn't do."

Former tenant Carol Powell called a project-wide meeting last August in an attempt to get the day-care center off the ground.

Past surveys have shown parents' desire for day-care services at Amazon, Steinfeld says. But day-care organizers discovered that some parents had a different kind of care in mind, she adds.

"Most parents wanted day-care for infants and toddlers," Steinfeld says. "But the requirements are different than they are for older kids, that we knew we wouldn't be able to do it."

The center's future was in limbo as ACT representatives debated the kind of service it should provide.

"We finally got up the courage and told parents, 'Sorry, we can't do it,' and went ahead with a center for two-and-a-half to six-year-olds," Steinfeld says.

The center, located beside the Amazon playground, has been awarded temporary state certification. Steinfeld expects permanent certification to be awarded within several weeks.

ACT members had hoped tenants would enroll their children before the beginning of fall term, but hired the center's two teachers only four days before its opening.

"We only have 10 children now. But we're aiming for 20 and I'm certain we'll reach that goal before the end of the term, after parents

have a chance to get to know us," Steinfeld says.

Tuition is currently \$60 a month for each child, and does not meet the costs of teachers' salaries and supplies.

"Our main problem is financial because we are committed to low tuition," Steinfeld says. "We're helping the parents who fall between the lines — those who aren't eligible for CSD payments (state-funded subsidies) and can't afford \$150 a month," Steinfeld says.

Because ACT is a non-profit, incorporated organization, the day-care center will be able to apply for various kinds of funding, Steinfeld says.

The housing office has been particularly helpful in providing supplies and maintenance, she adds.

"Willy Hart makes all the arrangements, so we're never in touch with these people. But I think a day-care center probably reflects well on the housing office."

The center is important because it provides parents a contact with the community, Steinfeld says.

"If it's going to be a good place, the parents are going to have to make it a good place," she adds.

Although the day-care center is sponsored by ACT, parents will serve on a governing board and make most decisions, Steinfeld emphasizes.

"I think the day-care center is very significant in terms of how far ACT has come," Steinfeld insists.

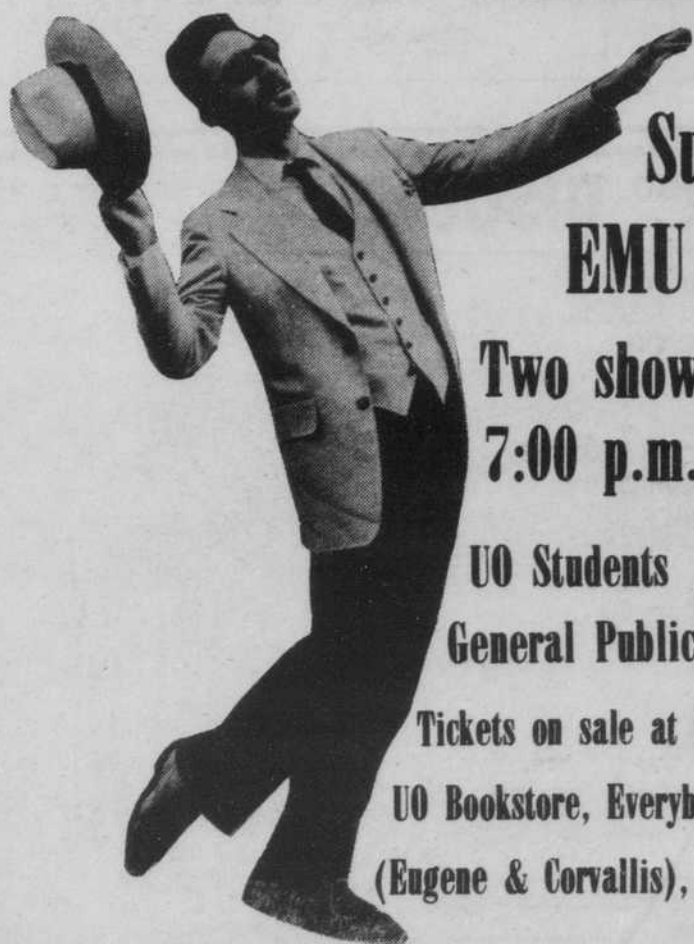
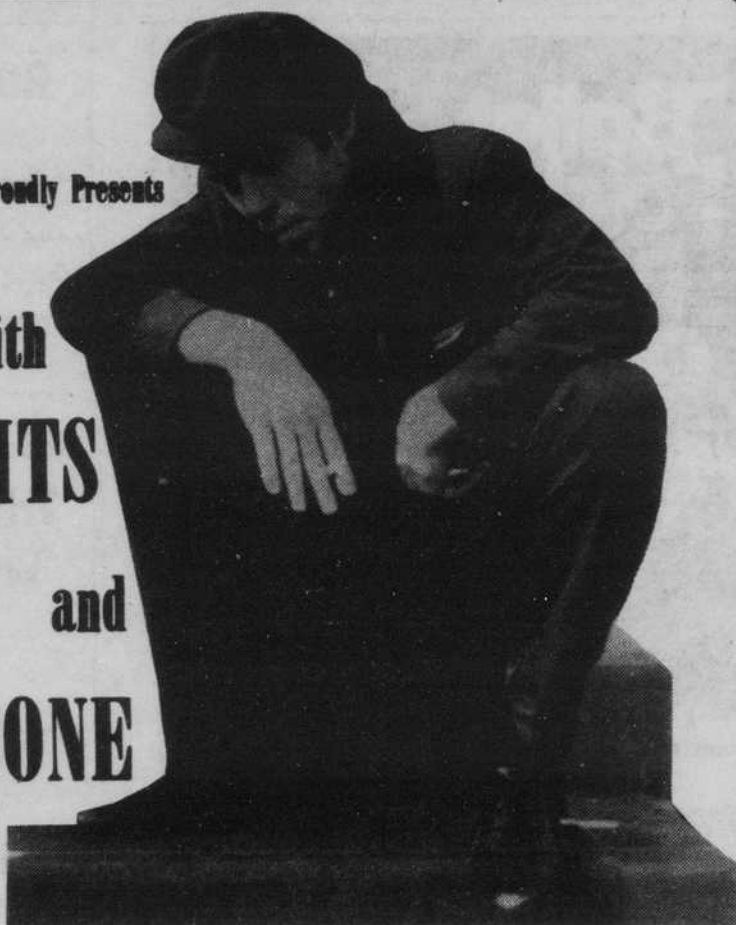
"ACT has always been good at reacting to dangers — like an increase in rent. But we had a lot to learn to be able to do something like this," she says.

Amazon parents interested in the day-care services should contact the center's teachers. The center is open Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.

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