

The TIMES

of Middle Country

SERVING CENTEREACH • SELDEN • NORTHERN LAKE GROVE

Volume 6, No. 10

June 24, 2010

75C



Librarian Deborah Hempe receives a little help Monday planting a garden designed to teach children about the five senses.

Photo by Jennifer Choi

Exploration begins at MCPL

BY JENNIFER CHOI
jenchoi@trnewspapers.com

The Middle Country Public Library in Centereach debuted its new interactive outdoor Nature Explorium on Monday.

Developed by MCPL staff to provide an outdoor setting ripe with educational opportunities for children, the Nature Explorium offers free programs for families to become engaged in and knowledgeable about nature and their outdoor surroundings.

In the 5,000-square-foot Explorium, there are several areas where children can participate in various hands-on activities such as planting seeds, climbing and crawling, arts and crafts using natural materials, and good, old-fashioned playing with dirt.

Dedicated to exploration and discovery, the Nature Explorium aims to provide children with the opportunity to learn and reinforce the development of observation, visual-spatial and social skills, according to information provided by the library. Educational programs, both group-oriented and self-directed, will focus on preschool through upper elementary school-aged children and their parents or caregivers.

MCPL librarian Deborah Hempe, who was involved in developing the explorium for the past three years, said it's "great to see it go from paper to reality." A Middle Country resident for 25 years, Hempe

said she hopes children will "really learn to enjoy and have an appreciation for the outdoors and nature so that they'll want to be outside more, and the environment becomes more important to them."

Among the first to visit the Nature Explorium on Monday was Janine Smith, a Ronkonkoma resident who often travels to the Middle Country library with her nieces and nephews. "I love it," Smith said of the Explorium. "It's nice for them to be outside."

Lisa Piccone of Lake Grove was also enjoying watching her 4-year-old grandson play in the Explorium. "It's adorable," Piccone said. "It's absolutely wonderful for the children. It's a great way for them to learn, too."

Linda Gauck, a Middle Country library clerk for 10 years, said the Nature Explorium provides a "fabulous" outdoor educational setting for young children. "There's nothing like fresh air," Gauck said. "They're going to learn a lot by being out here."

The clerk, who lived in Selden for 24 years before moving to Coram a year ago, said her own children "practically grew up in this library." Enjoying the "serene environment" of the Explorium, Gauck said the new outdoor center offers a place that "encourages creativity" while allowing children to "really explore and observe" and "be at peace and one with nature."