

# Orange officials celebrate opening of new downtown preschool



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**ORANGE** – City officials on Thursday welcomed the first signs of life into a building they hope might help resuscitate its downtown.

Mayor Dwayne Warren and others helped cut a ribbon outside Le Parc Place preschool – the first business to take root on the ground floor of a mixed-income, 72-unit residential building at 50-55 South Essex Avenue.

In a brief address at the school, he recalled the state of the property just a few years ago – when it was little more than a vacant lot across from the city's NJ Transit station. The building opened to tenants in spring 2014.

"There was a lot of work to be done. Historically in Orange we didn't do well in terms of leasing commercial property," he said, crediting owners L&M Development for much of its transformation into a vibrant building filled with new tenants and now a preschool.

"L&M builds this building, populates this building and then turned around and said we have a beautiful commercial tenant. Our city was filled with joy at the progress."

Le Parc Place, which also has a school in Maplewood, is currently accepting applications, and will begin its first classes of children up to 5 at its newest location in early June.

The school practices a self-professed "progressive" method of education based on a personalized approach based on each student's personality, according to Chief Operating Officer Zina Phillips. It also emphasizes learning in new languages such as French, Spanish and Sign Language and maintains its own chef and nutritionist to feed students healthy, locally grown produce.

Officials and other partners said the unique approach helped contribute to a new image of Orange as a city ready to blossom for years to come.

"We don't have to dig too deeply to find explanations for why we are so excited about Orange," said John Cortell, L&M's vice president of development.