Children in one of the first classes at 'The Co-op' are, front row, left to right, Sarah Van Buren, Bryn Watkins, Phil Lewis, Raquel Jordan, Khan Schwanhausser and Josh Schott; second row, left to right, Lara DiMaio, Scooter Inguagiato, Devon Kirkpatrick, David Withers and Mark Dillemuth.

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Jane Herrin, first teacher and director of the Community Cooperative Nursery School, reads to a class in the early 1970s.

Photos provided by Paula Dillemuth

By ED CULLEN

Parents involved in a big way at 'best kept secret in Baton Rouge'

A woman whose children attended Community Cooperative Nursery School in Baton Rouge compares the preschool to the post office at Cortana Mall.

"The school's not that well-known," said Andrea Grenier. "It's like the post office at Cortana Mall. We're the best kept secret in Baton Rouge.

A Grenier child, Thomas, now 6, last attended "The Co-op" in May 1998. Brothers John-Paul and Adam, now 11 and 9, also attended the school. Their mother misses the school. At "The Co-op," parents feel they have as much to do with the school as their children.

Paula Dillemuth, who has been with the school since 1973 as a founder, parent, teacher and director, thinks the nursery school is the only cooperative in Louisiana.

"There are a lot in the West, places in the North, Canada," Dillemuth said. "In a 10-mile radius of Portland, Ore., there are 60.

Closer to home, Grenier said, "there are quite a few in Texas, Austin in particular."

In the Baton Rouge school's 26 years, rarely have there been more than 10 children waiting for one of the 28 to 36 slots, Dillemuth said.

The school isn't for everyone. It's not day care, meeting from 9 a.m. to 11:45 a.m. Monday through Thursday. Two-year-olds come two mornings a week, 3-year-olds..."