

# November 2010

# INSIDE THE WOODS

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### **It's Raise-the-Roof Raffle Time, Folks . . .**

This year's raffle items will sure enough have you raising the roof in celebration – we're talking cold, hard cash here, and on the barrelhead, coming to you as VISA gift cards.

There will be four drawings for four gift cards in March 2011. The values are \$2500, \$1000, \$500, and \$250.

Ticket sales begin November 8, with a letter and tickets going out to all parents.



After that, tickets will be for sale in the main office, at all campus events, and later, in the carpool line.

Proceeds will benefit the construction of the High School gymnasium, a facility to be used by all students and families. **YOU CAN'T WIN IF YOU DON'T BUY TICKETS!**

### **Montessori Up Close! Learn about Montessori in evening sessions**

Each year, School of the Woods presents five evening sessions, conducted by faculty, devoted to explaining the Montessori method and describing how it affects students at each level.

The first two will be held in November, both starting at 7 PM. Woods Middle School will be the subject on Monday, November 8. Faculty will discuss and demonstrate how Montessori philosophy impacts and promotes love of learning in 7<sup>th</sup>- and 8<sup>th</sup>-grade students.

On Tuesday, November 9, faculty and students will lead a program about the college prep curriculum in the Montessori environment. They will discuss how Montessori education tenets and fundamentals apply to the older student.

Participation in both of these sessions is significant for parents of now-lower school students, in that those parents can become aware of the long-term benefits of continuous Montessori education.

Three additional Montessori Up Close sessions will take place in January: Tuesday, January 11, Upper Elementary; Tuesday January 18, Lower Elementary; and Tuesday, January 25, Early Childhood and Kindergarten – all at 7 PM.



## Meet The Board of Trustees

School of the Woods has a terrific Board of Trustees and it does a fine job of overseeing the school's business. The board meets four times a year and currently consists of ten members:

President: Robert T. Deden, current parent, is a civil engineer (Robert T. Deden Services).

Vice President: David Dickinson, past parent, is an attorney (Dickinson Law).

Treasurer: Daniel McGuire, current parent, is a CPA. (Daniel P. McGuire, PC).

Secretary: Chris O'Niell, past parent, is retired.

Gary Eaton, past parent, is Associate Dean of Academic Affairs, The Art Institute of Houston.

Joan Erickson, current parent, is president of Maverick Precision Manufacturing.

Russell Herron, past parent, is a software engineer and a website developer.

Cheryl Fowler, past parent, is owner of *Complements of Cheryl*.

Margaret Sallans-Noecker, past parent, is Head of School, The Parish School.

David Welling is a current parent and commercial artist/designer.

Sherry Herron, Head of School, School of the Woods, ex officio member.

## What the Board Does

The principal duties of the board are financial planning and budgeting of the school's resources and developing long-term plans for the school's growth.



The board also maintains an architectural Master Plan, which is updated from time to time, and conducts capital fundraising programs for implementing improvements to the physical plant.

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## Understanding Happiness

In our culture, we use the word "happy" as though happy is a goal unto itself. An elusive objective, indeed.

The meanings of happiness and pleasure are used interchangeably. Happiness and pleasure are not the same concept and to think so is dangerous. Pleasure-seeking will not bring us happiness.

Conversely, happiness is rarely found in pleasant activities, or in activities designed to avoid pain or hardship.

In the dictionary, the word "happy" has sparse company along with its root word, hap, meaning luck, fortune, chance or an occurrence. Happiness,

happen, hapless, haply, happenstance are happy's only companions. From its original Old English roots, happy relates to having good luck or fortune.

Our forefathers saw the "pursuit of happiness" as an 'unalienable' right. We have the right, and the corresponding responsibility, to take advantage of the circumstances that "happen" to come our way, to make events happen, to search for our luck, "follow our bliss."

The "hap" we seek, though, is not guaranteed to be pleasurable. We are energized as we work toward our dreams and feel connected to something larger than ourselves. Obstacles and hardships are endured and overcome.

The experience of being fully engaged creates happiness. The completion of a meaningful task brings us pleasure and a "natural high." Trying to recreate that natural high feeling of satisfaction and purpose without the corresponding activity or work can create addictive behaviors, which ultimately destroys one's ability to pursue happiness.

In working with children, we need to help them learn that positively participating in their lives by making choices and taking full responsibility for those choices is the path to happiness. They will learn to see the "hap" or luck inherent in each situation and engage themselves fully in the pursuit of happiness.

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Adapted from "Essays for Parents and Teachers," by Maren Schmidt, M.Ed.

## Sensitive Periods and Montessori's Planes of Development

*"Ahhh. The fulfillment of identifying a problem, sitting down to think about it, and using our hands to construct a solution brings us a peace and inner satisfaction unlike any other. This must be a hint of what it's like for a young child in a sensitive period when he is in the process of building himself."*

*Trevor Eissler  
Montessori Madness*

Dr. Montessori was among the first to write about sensitive periods as applied to human development. Her ideas have since been validated by scientists who study brain development and specifically a phenomenon called neuronal pruning in which the brain reduces the overall number of neurons.

You may hear these sensitive periods referred to as "critical periods" or "windows of opportunity" (Pedersen and Pedersen).

When a child is in a sensitive period, it means that for several intense periods each day lasting for weeks or for a year or more, there is a perfect opportunity to learn specific skills or to acquire specific capabilities with ease. It is possible to learn a skill once the sensitive period has passed, but only with extra effort.

"An opportunity is missed when this period passes... Sensitive periods stoke a fire in the belly, a

physical or intellectual itch which must be fed or scratched" (Eissler).

During a sensitive period, the child's receptivity is increased, understanding will be deeper, and learning will be more enjoyable.

Dr. Montessori wrote about many sensitive periods in a child's development. In what she called the First Plane of Development (from age 0 to 6), that of the "absorbent mind," children are learning movement, language, order and organization, refining the senses, exploring spatial and social relationships, and they will have a fixation on small objects and tiny details.

They will become fascinated with writing and attempt to reproduce letters and numbers (Montessori discovered that writing precedes reading).

There will be a spontaneous interest in the sounds and symbols for reading as well as an interest in forming the basic concepts of quantity and number operations.

Children at this age will internalize polite and considerate behavior if they are exposed to those behaviors. If a child's environment offers all these elements, then a strong foundation for intellectual growth and emotional well-being is established.

The Second Plane of Development (ages 6 to 12) is a very stable and a more intellectual age. The two main sensitive periods for this age are for abstract understanding and imagination. Here the child uses creative imagination based on reality to

build an understanding of the world in which she lives and the interrelated functioning of the universe. Elementary children are able to store and organize a great amount of information from a wide range of disciplines (Heather Pedersen and Jason Pedersen, *What is Montessori?*).

In the Third Plane of Development (ages 12 to 18), the adolescent seeks to understand his place in society and looks for opportunities to contribute.

The adolescent is drawn to activities that involve high ideals and enjoys working on projects that require action. Youth in the early years of the third plane of development (12-15) are much like their counterparts in the first plane; they can be self-absorbed, they need adequate food and sleep to sustain rapid growth, and they need time to "just be."

Learning and mental development may even slow down as more time is spent on their own, with friends, and eating and sleeping. They continue to be concerned with justice and fairness, they will believe they can make a difference in the world, and will be focused on finding purpose in life.

What a gift of enthusiasm and hope for the world these students bring as they move into the Fourth Plane of Development to find their place in society

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Adapted from the North American Montessori Center Website  
<http://montessoritraining.blogspot.com>

# Creating Optimal Environments for Adolescents

by Dr. Betsy Coe

The first part of this article appeared in the October issue of Inside the Woods and described the adolescent behavioral factors Dr. Coe considered in developing a Montessori environment for their education. In this second part, she discusses --

## 2. *Community Building and Student Leadership*

Maria Montessori advised us to provide adolescents a school of experience in the elements of social life. The community is very important for adolescents and every day provides opportunities to experience elements of social life. Every morning begins with a community meeting both in middle and high school.

All students and faculty rotate through the responsibility of leading the community meeting using an agenda of sharing, acknowledging, problem solving, challenges, general announcements, and short lessons on habits of mind, communication skills, or grace and courtesy. At the high school community members offer a soap box on something meaningful to them.

Adolescents are coming to school ready to talk to their peers. I have found that having community meetings at the beginning of the day allows the students to share with the whole community versus a small group of friends. This has contributed to an atmosphere of inclusion.

In both middle and high school, there are many opportunities for building a community with small-group work, shared decision making and problem solving, and an environment that fosters trust, group interaction and dialog. Some of the bonding experiences for middle school are writing a class constitution when studying government, participating in the ROPES course, and living as a micro-community at the land laboratory for several weeks during the school year.

High school students have a retreat the first week of school where they share the work of living in a

community and writing the high school handbook, including policies and procedures. Here is the mission statement written by the students:

*We, the students, faculty and staff of Woods High School, strive to create an open-minded and intellectually stimulating community that implements the Montessori philosophy. We inspire individuals to become lifelong learners and interdependent global citizens.*

*Our motto: Lifelong Learners. Lifelong learners know the joy of discovery, the power of knowledge, and the value of creative and critical thinking. School of the Woods provides an environment that fosters the development of lifelong learners who use their skills to make positive contributions throughout their lives.*

The high school students are creating the new rituals for each level, which we call markers, including designing senior rings, service to School of the Woods, the community, special self-construction classes, and important ceremonies.



# LET'S GO PLACES!

**Fascinating stuff . . . Here is information on current happenings in Houston, suggested by Elementary teachers, which will engage the interests of the whole family.**

## Now At Houston Museum of Natural Science -

*Forgotten Gateway: Coming to America Through Galveston Island -- October 1, 2010 - Feb. 20, 2011*

From 1845 to 1924, the Port of Galveston was a major gateway to American immigration. This exhibition is the first of its kind to explore Galveston's legacy as a port of entry on a national scale. It brings to light the little known yet rich era of Galveston's history and importance to the growth of Texas and the American Midwest.



*Poster of a Passenger Line from Hamburg to Galveston*

While New York's Ellis Island's location made it a natural port for Europeans, Galveston attracted a diverse group of people from Europe, Mexico, South and Central America and even Asia. Before the Civil War, it was a major port for forced migration – the sale and transport of slaves from Africa and other points in the United States to Texas.



*Group of Russian Jewish immigrants at North German Lloyd Wharf in Galveston 1907*

The exhibit highlights enduring themes in the history of immigration, including: the dangers of the journey; making a life in a new land; navigating bureaucracy; confronting discrimination; and becoming "American." These trials and tribulations are illuminated through personal stories, dynamic visitor interactive kiosks, engaging media pieces, and more than 200 original artifacts and documents.

(See the museum's website [hmns.org](http://hmns.org) for more details and ticket information.)

Make a big note: Just about one year from now, King Tut, everybody's favorite celebrity, will make another visit to Houston, at the Museum of Fine Arts, Oct. 13, 2011 through April 15, 2012.



## At The Health Museum: *Learn All About You.*

The Health Museum now has a fine permanent exhibit called You: The Exhibit.



Its components allow investigation into the who, what, where, when, and how of YOU.

Using the latest multi-media and special effects technology, the Health Museum has created an experience that will take the museum visitor on a journey to explore their physical selves, mental selves and their future selves.

The sophisticated media nature of the exhibition encourages group interaction and participation in the exhibition, and visitors are able to leave something of themselves behind to change the experience over time.

### **BIG ANNOUNCEMENT**

You are cordially invited to go now to your computers and take in the wonders of

OUR NEW AND IMPROVED

### **WEBSITE**

you'll be glad you did  
[www.schoolofthewoods.org](http://www.schoolofthewoods.org)

A Review by Lalit Ecka of

## *THE CHILD IN THE FAMILY*

By Maria Montessori

(Translated by Nancy Rockmore Cirillo)



This book is concise and easy to understand. It is written for parents and teachers – the child's main

educators for life. Maria Montessori underscores the importance of a child's spiritual expression.

This spiritual expression is essential for the constant growth and formation of a child's personality. She further adds that adults need to learn to respect, understand, and support "all reasonable forms of activity the child engages in." When an intervention is premature (whether it is an appreciation, criticism, or even calling for attention) it thwarts the spiritual expression. Children are extremely sensitive to external influences. These findings of Maria Montessori come from her systematic and scientific observations of children across several cultures. Likewise she presents the basic principles of her educational theory through real life examples.

Throughout the book, Maria Montessori brings out some of the salient characteristics of children and adults. They are different and appear conflicting in nature. Since a child lives in

an adult world, the adult (parents and teachers) must diligently remove obstacles that prevent a child's natural and innate spiritual expression.

Through this expression, the child learns and understands that he/she is an important part of or a significant link to his/her environment. Hence, it is the creation of such a climate which allows for a child's free and natural spiritual expression that forms the basis for Maria Montessori's educational philosophy.

Some of Maria Montessori's insights on children and suggestions for adults are summed up below:

- A child is commonly viewed as an appendage to the adult. On the contrary, he is a separate entity with different needs, one who constantly strives to fulfill the highest ends of life.
- A child reminds us to stay awake. When we don't adhere to his prodding, we finally become insensitive to others and our surroundings.
- "Only the immediate observation of children whose freedom was respected, revealed some of the inner being that I understand to be of universal value."
- "Many parents believe that their children should submit to order without any discussion and at the same time, would have their children love them with all their hearts. Here, too, the child is often the teacher of

the parent, for his thoughts are pure and his sense of justice unbelievable."

- Being concerned about a child's physical needs and safety are not enough. What is significant is to respect the impulses of his spirit and know how to support them. It is "most important to respect all the reasonable forms of activity in which the child engages and try to understand them. We must support as much as possible the child's desire for activity -- not wait on him, but educate him to be independent."

- As children are quite sensitive – more than we know – to external influences, we should be cognizant of our interactions with children and of our behavior around them. This does not imply that we ought to "appear perfect in the eyes of children, rather, it is necessary that we recognize our defects and patiently accept the child's just observations. Recognizing this principle, we can excuse ourselves before children when we have done something unjust."

These insights remind us to reexamine our attitudes and behaviors toward children and adults alike. It urges us to recognize the sacred and important role we play in the lives of our children. "We are no longer powerful adults but adults made humble."

Reviewed by  
Lalit Ecka, Dr.PH

## Encouraging Positive Behaviors At Home

Everything your child needs to know about life is developing long before kindergarten. Your school is helping you to develop positive skills, attributes, and character qualities every day. Explore ways that are comfortable for you to incorporate into your own household with routines and actions that build on these character qualities and traits.

Chores around the house, of all types, develop accountability and character. When you ask your child to do something, follow up and make sure it is done.

To help children learn to make wise decisions, present them with choices (example: Do you want to do your chores now or in one hour?). Never give a child a choice when there is really no choice. Let your child live with the consequence.

Create daily routine and family traditions. Not making frequent and abrupt changes in routine gives daily continuity and coherence to children's lives. It is the occasional change that adds spice to the routine.

Work with your child to develop tenacity. Allow time for tasks to be finished and limit distractions that preclude concentration. Activities that foster concentration include reading, board games, puzzles, conversations with questions and answers that require thought.

Build confidence by helping your child develop a skill or a hobby they can be good at.

For the development of initiative encourage creativity. Have an attitude of non-criticism when things don't turn out as they should. Help your child learn to clean up after herself.

Teach good manners by example: please and thank you, may I.

Help your child learn to work well in a group by having him help to cook or clean. It takes more time but it builds a strong family bond.

Establish guidelines for at home movement. We walk inside, we run outside, we put things back where we found them.

Allow children to repeat activities until they are done well.

Deal gently with character flaws while encouraging character qualities.

Be aware that there are "teaching moments" all the time.

Occasionally use the off button on the sounds of civilization. Help your child listen to her own thoughts.

Foster success by helping your child know what the expectations are so he can meet them.

Promote a good work ethic by working with your child. Children tend not to work well alone on projects not of their own choosing.

Don't make your child grow up too soon. Time is the essence of life. Give your child more time. Reduce his stress and yours. Start your morning earlier so your child has time-time to eat, time to make the bed, get dressed, etc.

Don't invest much emotion in a child's mistakes. Invest time in helping him work through them. Blame doesn't bring success, happiness, or mastery. Give your child time to self correct.

Prepare for beyond time and space. Share your spiritual life with your child.

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Adapted from Edward Fidellow, Getting Your Money's Worth Workbook.

## Lady Wildcats Wrap Up Volleyball Schedule

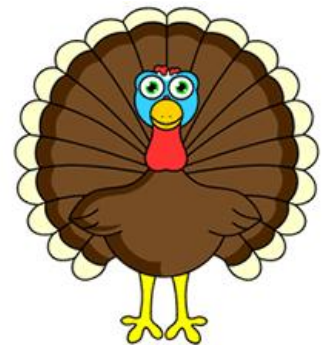
Girls from both Woods Middle School and Woods High School make up the Lady Wildcats volleyball team.

They are Lauren Almstedt, 8<sup>th</sup> grade; Sara Al-Shaikh, fresh-man; Kelly Benthien, senior; Caroline Catlin, freshman; Claire Cooper, freshman; Anna De Francesco, freshman; Claire Nobles, junior; Kiya Osha, 8<sup>th</sup> grade; Tristin Segler, sopho-more; Amanda Shelby, senior; Morgan Stevens, 7<sup>th</sup> grade.

The league they play in includes KIPP Academy, YES Southwest, YES East End, Central Christian Academy, The Briarwood School; George Sanchez High School, and YES Southwest. The competition consisted of 12 game dates, with three to four matches in each, from Sept. 10 through Oct. 18th.

"Our girls worked hard as a team and never gave up," said Coach Amanda Villanueva. They ended the season 9-3, the best volleyball season yet, according to Athletic Director Brittany Faske.

Basketball season has begun for boys and girls. Check the schedule on the website.



Guest of Honor