

Learning for Life at SACRED MEADOW

Montessori Children's House

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*"Let us give the child a vision of the whole universe . . .
for all things are connected to form one whole unity."*

– Dr. Maria Montessori (1870-1952)



Sacred Meadow students: Painter, Cooper, Tanner, Kaitlin, Madeline, Kendall, Ingrid, Ellie, Owen, Ethan, Skyler, Maddy, Evangeline, Avabella, Elijah, Rowan, Annabelle, and Graham.

A small Montessori school nestled within the tiny town of Accident, Maryland, is making a big impact on the lives of its young students. Since its doors opened about four years ago, the Sacred Meadow Montessori Children's House is now full, with a waiting list.

"We follow the child," says owner and director Carolyne Stolzenfels, describing the core tenet of the Montessori

Method. "Children have a desire to learn that is on fire, and so we get out of the way to let them learn."

A typical Sacred Meadow day includes work periods focusing on traditional subjects that include language arts, math, science, geography. Interwoven among them are sensorial activities, art, theater, music and practical life learning that can include gardening, cooking or sweeping

the floor. Play time and fun is part of the mix, too. Throughout the day, teachers facilitate rather than direct activities. “Teachers are supposed to be invisible,” Stolzenfels says of the Montessori educational approach.

Maria Montessori, Italy’s first female physician, developed her distinctive educational philosophy by carefully observing how children naturally learn. In 1907, she opened the Casa dei Bambini, or Children’s House, in a low-income area of Rome as part of an urban renewal project. News of its success spread throughout Italy, and her landmark book, *The Montessori Method*, brought her message to an international audience. Montessori schools began to proliferate around the world.

Central to the Montessori Method is the belief that the child is naturally motivated to learn when provided with a supportive, carefully prepared educational environment. Necessary components for an authentic Montessori program include multiage groupings to encourage peer learning, uninterrupted work periods, and guided work activities using specially designed Montessori learning materials. This combination of elements allows each child to make internally guided choices, with teacher support when needed, to foster his or her personal development.

As students mature, Montessori teachers provide them with lessons and materials appropriate to their individual needs. During early childhood, students learn primarily through sensory-motor activities. As they move through the elementary school period, students begin to move from concrete to more abstract thinking by working with Montessori learning materials and an interdisciplinary curriculum. By adolescence, students have developed the ability to organize information and apply knowledge to everyday life situations. Now they can grasp, intellectually and emotionally, such universal concepts as justice, freedom and fairness.

Currently Sacred Meadow offers instruction for two age groups: birth to age 3, and ages 3 to 6, with a staff of



Top photo: Teacher, Ms. Brittany Slagle (seated) and Ellie Stolzenfels. Standing, teachers, Ms. Carlyne Stolzenfels and Ms. Misty Sharpless.

Bottom photo: Ms. Lizzy playing the piano with Katy, Rowan, Cooper, Ingrid, Madeline, Ethan, Ellie, Ms. Brittany, Painter, Annabelle, Ms. Amelia, Skyler, and Trenton.



Maddy, Owen, Kendall, Cooper, Evangeline, Ellie, Madeline, Kaitlin, Ethan, Elijah, and Ms. Carolyne having a snack.

The "outdoor classroom" is a vital part of the program for students Katy, Maddy, Evangeline, Ellie, Ben and Tanner.



two lead teachers and one teachers' assistant. To help working parents, the school is open 10 hours daily, Monday through Friday, and is licensed as a day care provider.

"We work to make it affordable," Carolyne says. "We try to get those kids who need it most. It's a great opportunity for children that will make a difference in their lives." Her comment is supported by research described in "Evaluating Montessori Education," published in the September 2006 issue of Science magazine.

Carolyne became intrigued by the Montessori Method while working as a reading specialist at a public school in Colorado. Describing herself as a "farm girl at heart," she grew up on a homestead in West Virginia, earned an art education degree and met her husband Craig at West Virginia University. They moved to Evergreen, Colorado, and spent several years there before moving back east after Craig found a job at Nemaocolin Woodlands. With Craig's new job in Pennsylvania and their parents' homes in West Virginia, the couple decided to settle somewhere between, and so they discovered Accident. "We are very happy we moved here," Carolyne says.

While working in the Garrett County schools as a reading specialist, she began looking at preschools for her children. After failing to find one that suited her, she decided to "take a leap of faith" and quit her job to pursue Montessori teacher training from the North American Montessori Center. After earning certification for birth through 3rd grade, she started a Montessori classroom at home for her daughter and several other children. Word spread and people inquired about enrolling their children, but she had to turn them away for lack of space.



Kylynn Vitez and her watercolor art.

The time seemed right to find a building for a school. "A little house fell in my lap," she recalls. "It was the

perfect kids' house." But she decided it was just too expensive. About eight months later, the house's owners called with an affordable offer. After renovations were completed, the Sacred Meadow Montessori School opened its doors.

Carolyn's passion for the Montessori Method is reflected in the school's name. She chose the word "Sacred" to describe the brief, early childhood years, especially from ages 1 to 3, as a spiritual phase of maximum personal development. The word "Meadow" reflects diversity. "We're all different and we need to learn to live together in our community," she says. "We use a 'peace table' to resolve conflicts."

Community support has been strong, from a diverse spectrum of families. While some parents are attracted to the Montessori concept, others consider pragmatic aspects like convenience, quality of the food and affordability, and "some just don't care." She has students whose parents drive an hour each way. Some of her students are homeschooled while



Avabella, Painter, Skyler, and Graham having a snack.

others are not. "Sacred Meadow gives them all a chance to mingle."

"I've found my calling," Carolyn says. "I believe that Sacred Meadow is being watched by a higher power."

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