

Good News Gazette

December 2011-January 2012

Holiday Gifts that Encourage Creativity

The holiday season is upon us! Regardless of your holiday traditions, most of our families' celebrations will include gifts for children and special meals or parties. Many will either travel to see family or host visitors in their own homes.

Whether you are looking for practical gift ideas that encourage active learning, you are entertaining young visitors, or you just want to play with your child to escape the frenzy of the season, here are some ideas for you...

The advocacy group TRUCE (Teachers Resisting Unhealthy Children's Entertainment) works to promote safe, healthy play for children. Their gift giving guide has some practical ideas for age-appropriate toys that encourage active learning.

...expensive toys in fancy packages aren't necessarily the best.

Shoe box gifts are collections of small, familiar items that are organized around a play theme and presented in an appealing way. They also show that expensive toys in fancy packages aren't necessarily the best.

Making Shoe Box Gifts

- Decorate an empty shoe or appropriate-sized box and lid (gift wrap, stickers, etc.)

- Choose a theme and put a clear label on the box which includes both a simple word and picture of the theme.
- Most of the items we suggest are found at hardware stores, pharmacies, stationery stores, art/crafts stores, supermarkets.
- Use small containers, ziplock sandwich bags, or build dividers with small pieces of cardboard to make compartments for the various items in the shoe box. Young children appreciate organization—being able to return everything to its place.
 - Most of these suggestions are appropriate and safe for children to use independently;

however, objects in some kits may require adult supervision and/or aid (e.g., food coloring.)

Shoe Box Gift Theme Ideas: Use these or create your own

Sensory Fun

- hypoallergenic, unscented shaving cream (use whipped cream for younger children who will try to eat the cream!)



In This Issue

2012 Contracts	3
Bulletin Board	4-5
Closing Due to Inclement Weather	3
CPR & First Aid	7
Important Notes	2
Neighborhood News	6
Parent Advisory Group ..	7
Parking Lot Safety	3
Staff News	6
Upcoming Events	8



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continued on page 7



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Important Notes

Winter Break

All Gretchen's House Centers will be **closed December 23– January 2**. We will reopen again on Tuesday, January 3, 2012. If your family will be gone before or after the break, please let us know in advance. Many teachers request time off during the holidays. Substitutes are in short supply at this time of year so it helps us to know if attendance will be low.

Morning preschool will not be in session on January 3–6. We will resume our regular schedule on Monday, January 9, 2012.

Outdoor Clothing Needed

Cold weather is here! Please send your child to school with the **appropriate outdoor gear**, because we go outside every day, unless the wind chill is below 0. At this time of year, each child needs:

- a warm coat
- snow pants
- waterproof mittens
- hat
- snow boots
- slippers or "inside only" shoes

We also recommend having two or three extra pairs of socks along with size and weather-appropriate extra clothes in your child's cubby. We are working on establishing a good supply of extra outdoor gear at each center. If you have gently used coats, snowpants, gloves or boots that your child has outgrown, please consider donating them to our "extras" box. Any surplus that we receive will be donated to the Salvation Army's coat drive. Thanks for helping us make outdoor play more convenient and comfortable for all of our children!

If you are interested in learning more about our approach to **outdoor play**, please ask your teacher for a copy of the **purple page** on the subject.

Holiday Parties

It's that time again! Mark your calendars and join us for our center holiday parties. Each center has its own traditions, so check your parent bulletin board for details.

Mt. Vernon	12/22
Mt. Pleasant	12/10
Stadium (Winter Festival)	2/7/12
WISD	12/13
Traver	
Cottage Preschool	12/21
Preschool	12/14
Young 5s/School Age	12/14
I/T	12/20
Oak Valley	12/13
Dhu Varren	
Pond	12/12
Railroad	12/13
School-age	12/14
Farm	12/15

No Public School Days

The Ann Arbor Public Schools will be closed Friday, December 23rd through Friday, January 6th. School resumes on Monday, January 9th. Our winter holiday coincides with some of these dates, but we will offer full day care for kindergarten and school age children on January 3-6. Sign up sheets are posted in the Young 5s and school-age rooms.

Martin Luther King, Jr. Day – Centers Closed

Please take note that all Gretchen's House Centers will be closed on Monday, January 16, 2012. Staff will be busy with mid-year training. We appreciate parent support of our staff training time.



Closing Due to Inclement Weather

Gretchen's House may close when the Ann Arbor Public Schools close for inclement weather. Please call our snow line (480-8592) for information. **We will also have closings posted on our website, which we hope is convenient for families: www.gretchenshouse.com.**

If the Ann Arbor Public Schools close due to weather, Gretchen's House* will have a **delayed opening** at 10:00 a.m. If conditions do not improve, we will make a decision about whether to close for the day **by 9:00 a.m.** Call the snow line for information at that point. Many of our teachers live outside

the immediate Ann Arbor area, and treacherous driving conditions put them and your family in danger. Although it is our desire to stay open, safety must remain our first priority.

Staff members may not care for children during days when the center closes for weather conditions. We suggest parents trade care with other families on snow days if your work does not permit you to stay home.

***Gretchen's House IV at W.I.S.D. will close for the day any time the Ann Arbor schools are closed due to weather**



Parking Lot Safety

Please drive slowly through the parking lot at our centers, even if you don't see children nearby. This is especially important during the upcoming winter months, when ice patches may be present, despite our efforts to keep the parking lots clear.

Gretchen's House has a snow removal service, and staff work extra hard to keep the walkways clear and lightly salted during cold weather. You can help us by notifying the office when the parking lot needs attention.

Young children or infants should not be left in unattended cars, even if they are asleep in car seats. **Finally, we ask that you not leave your car running unattended in the parking lot.** Although they are rare, tragic accidents do occur when children are left alone, and when cars are left running unattended. We want to maintain a safe environment, inside and outside of our centers.



2012 Contracts

All currently enrolled families should have received a new child care contract for 2012 in November. These contracts reflect rates and days the centers will be closed for January-December, 2012. Contracts for 2012 were due to the office by December 1st. If you have questions about your schedule or fees, see your center director as soon as possible.

Please note that January billing statements will go out before we close on December 22nd. Payments are due when centers reopen on January 3, 2012. Late fees will be assessed for payments made after January 10th.



These staff members are celebrating Gretchen's House anniversaries this December and January!

Years

Heike Hampel	15
Kathleen Lovernick	14
Lea Augustine	14
Zarina Syed	8
Carrie McMurrian	6
Tanya Coulson	6
Kelly Potter	5
Nevatte Willis	4
Dolores Winn	4
Danielle Wiener	4
Crystal Lisabeth	4
Whitney Haynes	3
Jessica Landgraf	3
Hanh Bui	2
Janelle Lund	1
Hilary Hill	1
Rachel Alexander	1
Rachael Dunlap	1
Kia Johnson	1
Karmin Eddinger	1
Clare McFadden	1
Gretchen Martzke	1
Sharon Robertson	1
Casey Rook	1



Physical Development & Health



Full body movement develops parts of the brain that will be used later for more academic learning—and it's fun, too! (GH-Mt. Pleasant)



Picking apples gave us a chance to work our muscles, compare types of apples, and give them a taste-test, too! (GH-Oak Valley)



Tummy time is important for babies. We're moving big muscles while we explore! (GH-Oak Valley)



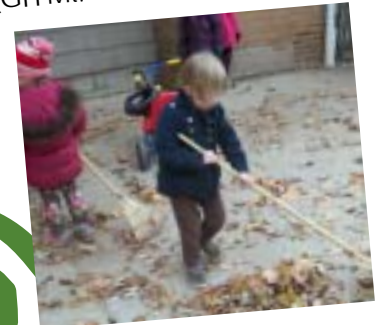
The corn maze made us think about our path in a different way—and we loved being outside in the fall weather! (GH-Traver)



Running and kicking the ball—hey, I'm playing soccer like the big kids! (GH-Mt. Pleasant & GH-Stadium)



Raking leaves builds our muscles. And having real work to do builds something else: our confidence! (GH-Mt. Vernon & GH-Oak Valley)

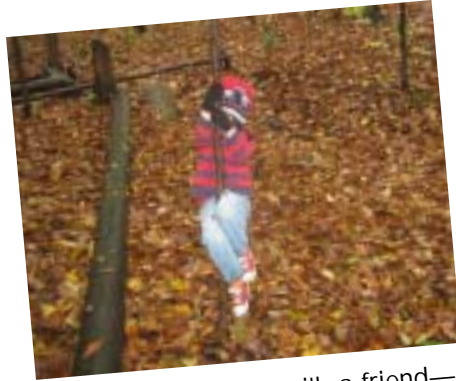


Pedaling the bike works my legs—having my friend on the back is a good work out! (GH-Dhu Varren & GH-WISD)





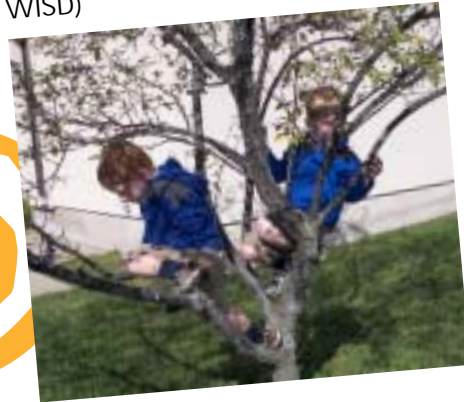
I practiced the ladder over and over, and now it's easy for me. (GH-Mt. Vernon)



Climbing trees is fun with a friend—or alone! We're practicing balance and getting stronger while we see things from a new perspective. (GH-WISD)



Even our littlest friends learn a lot from being outside. Exploring leaves and gourds help build my muscles and make sense of my world. (GH-Stadium)



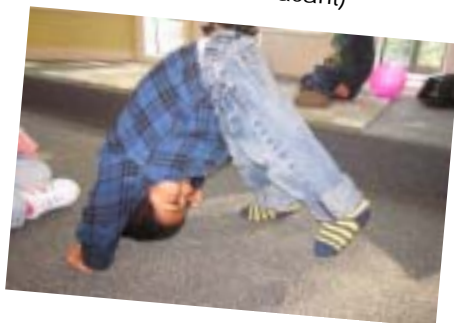
Shoveling sand or snow – either way, we're making plans, solving problems with materials and our friends, and getting good exercise!



Full body moves build great brain connections, whether it's preschool hopscotch or toddler yoga. (GH-Mt. Vernon & GH-Mt. Pleasant)



The pumpkins didn't stand a chance against our hammers, nails and screwdrivers. We used all of our muscles to carve the pumpkins, and practiced a lot of negotiating with friends, too. (GH-Oak Valley)



In October, Gretchen's House staff and some family members participated in the Making Strides Against Breast Cancer walk at Eagle Crest Golf Course in Ypsilanti. The team raised just under \$1,700 for the cause and a great time was had by all.



Neighborhood News

Staff News

Several Early LCC staff members attended the Building on Behalf of Children Conference in Howell in November. Aubrey VanOchten and Jennifer Rountree, Lead Preschool Teachers, presented a workshop titled "Is Your Classroom Wonderful? Promoting a Sense of Wonder in Your Early Childhood Classroom."

Christine Snyder, Julie Morrison, Nan Mastie, Lea Augustine, Laura Griswold, Michele Davis, Heidi McFadden, Loisann Arnold, Becky Stoessner, and Eva Hatfield attended the NAEYC conference in Orlando.

Preschool teachers from Mt. Vernon, Stadium, and Oak Valley attended six days of training on the HighScope Numbers Plus math curriculum, as part of our partnership with the HighScope Foundation. Preschool teachers from our other centers will receive this training over the summer.

GH-Mt. Vernon preschoolers hunted for pumpkins in the gardens and yard at their center. After the pumpkins warmed to room temperature the preschoolers painted the pumpkins with metallic paints. The teachers were surprised at how many of the children painted the pumpkins with orange paint instead of pink, purple, gold and silver. I guess it makes sense—most pumpkins are orange!

GH-Stadium collected travel size bath items and created bags to donate to the Ronald McDonald House located in the new UofM C.S. Mott Children's Hospital.

GH-Mt. Vernon preschoolers prepared homemade salsa for snack as well as toasting their own chips. The ingredients for the salsa were the last vegetables from their garden.

In November, the **GH-Oak Valley** Garden Infant, Toddler and Preschool rooms held a "Friendship Feast." Many family members were able to join the children and their teachers for a lunch prepared by the children and staff. The vegetable soup and banana bread tasted delicious and we all benefited by spending this lunch time together.

The focus of fall harvest was apparent at **GH-Dhu Varren**. Exploration of apples, pumpkins and gourds was in every classroom. Toddler carried their gourds around the playground and got their hands all gooey exploring the inside of pumpkins. Preschoolers and Young 5s excitedly boarded the bus to have time out in the community visiting apple orchards and pumpkin patches. Friendship feasts provided tasty treats as parents and children brought in ingredients for a delicious snack/meal.

GH-Early LCC has joined the Let's Move Child Care Campaign in the fight to prevent childhood obesity. To build a healthy generation of kids, they will work toward goals in the areas of physical activity, screen time, food, beverages, and infant feeding.

Renovation work has started in **GH-Traver's** Infant/Toddler Room. The renovation will help us continue to align with NAEYC's program standards. A special thanks to I/T Teacher, Jessica! Her organizational skills and hard work made moving to the barn a breeze! We also thank all of Traver's parents for their patience and support during the renovation. We look forward to the unveiling in January.

GH-Traver's Mainhouse Preschool room is enjoying a monthly music time with Emma's mom, Lisa! Thanks Lisa for sharing your talent with us! As always we welcome the opportunity for parents to come in and share their family traditions, cultural learning experiences, or special interest or talents with the children. You can set up a time with your child's family group teacher if you have something you would like to share with us.

Thanks to everyone who was able to make it to the **GH-WISD** Fall Harvest festival! The children enjoyed cooking fall snacks, decorating pumpkins, and rolling pumpkins down the big hill!

In October, **GH-Oak Valley** children were visited by the Pittsfield Fire Department and Police Department. Children were able to sit in the fire truck and police cars, received badges and stickers. The policemen and firemen were very friendly and answered the many questions the children had.



Holiday Gifts

continued from page 1

- plastic tray
- food coloring
- popsicle sticks, clean combs, plastic fork, etc.
- smock or old T-shirt

Shoe Box Garden

- plastic-lined shoe box
- potting soil
- seed packets
- small watering can
- popsicle sticks
- garden tools
- gardening gloves

Collage Kit

- roll of wax/craft/freezer paper
- recycled gift wrap/ribbon
- children's glue or tape
- pinecones, acorns, twigs, leaves, etc.
- found materials: old keys, plastic bottle tops, buttons, fabric scraps, etc.
- craft feathers, glitter, pipe cleaners, etc.

Rescue/Hospital

- flashlight
- bandaids
- fabric strips/ bandages
- ace bandage
- sling
- eye patch
- gauze
- stethoscope
- surgical mask

Playdough

- buy a can of playdough or make your own
- garlic press
- plastic knife
- popsicle sticks
- wooden dowel
- plastic lids

- small tray/plate
- buttons/beads
- plastic animals

Playdough Recipe

- 1 cup flour
- 1 Tbsp. oil
- 1 cup water
- 1/2 cup salt
- 2 tsp. cream of tartar
- food coloring

Mix ingredients in saucepan. Cook on low heat. Stir constantly until playdough pulls away from sides of pan. Scoop playdough onto wax paper. Knead until smooth. Store in airtight container.

Beyond Shoe Boxes

Recycle large boxes that can be painted/ decorated for dramatic play. Create a car, spaceship, animal, creature, house, or cave. Extend the play possibilities by adding blocks, flashlight, tablecloth, and/or pillows.

Materials:

- appliance box
- paint, tape, markers
- wallpaper books to decorate and glue
- utility knife (for adults to cut holes)
- carpet samples

For more information on promoting healthy play with young children, visit the TRUCE website: www.truceteachers.org or www.naeyc.org for information on a variety of topics relating to young children.

We wish you and your family a safe, healthy and happy new year!

Heidi McFadden



CPR/ First Aid

Parents are welcome to sign up for CPR and First Aid training through Gretchen's House. We schedule regular trainings each month for our staff. Cost to parents is \$20 for First Aid, \$14 for CPR, or \$30 for both. Classes are held at GH-Oak Valley, and they start at 6:00 p.m. Please contact Heike at Oak Valley to register: hhampel@gretchenshouse.com or 734.327.6126.

Upcoming Classes:

January 10
Initial First Aid and CPR

January 11
CPR Renewal



...because learning should be fun!

Upcoming Events

The **GH-Mt. Pleasant** center will hold their All-Center Family Breakfast on Saturday, December 10 from 9:00-10:30 at GH-Mt. Vernon. The staff will provide breakfast for all of the families.

The **GH-Mt. Pleasant** center will sponsor a food drive beginning November 16 to help support Food Gatherers in the fight against hunger in Washtenaw County. The food drive will go until the end of November and Food Gatherers will collect all of our donations on December 1. Thank you to all of the families who are able to participate.

All of **GH-Traver's** classroom will participate in a holiday giving drive. Please check Traver's website blog for detailed information on how to help. Thanks for your generosity.

GH-WISD will sponsor five children through the Education Project for Homeless Youth to provide them with gifts for the holiday season. If you are interested in making a contribution, please see the preschool teachers for more info.

On December 13, **GH-Oak Valley** will hold its annual Winter Wonderland from 4:30-5:45. This event is for children and their families. There will be gingerbread house decorating, face painting, and a craft activity. We

will also have a special guest, Hilo Greg, songwriter and artist. He will perform songs from his CD "Little Songs for Big Kids" and CDs will be available, should you enjoy the performance and want to take the music home.

GH-Dhu Varren plans to collect for Food Gatherers during the holiday season.

GH-WISD is sponsoring five children from the Education Project for Homeless Youth and eight children from SOS's Time for Tots to provide them with gifts and books this holiday season. If you are interested in making a contribution, please see one of the teachers.