

Good News Gazette

October–November 2010

Parent-Teacher Partnerships

The fall calendars are already filling up! We hope you are able to participate in the potluck and curriculum night scheduled at your center this fall.

As a parent, I still look forward to curriculum night at my daughter's school. She's a sophomore in high school now, so the evening looks a *little* different than it does in our centers. I have the added challenge of walking through her schedule and finding each of her classes! Wandering the crowded hallways, I am always happy to see former Gretchen's House parents. The community we built years ago continues to ebb and flow.

Building community is essential for raising healthy learners. Research repeatedly shows that family involvement is critical to a child's success in school. Unfortunately, studies also show that parent involvement in school drops steadily as children get older. As a mom of two and an aunt to 11 nieces and nephews, I can attest to the importance of staying connected with children, their friends, other parents, and their schools - at every age.

For most of you, that advice seems directed to another lifetime. What can we do now to provide a strong partnership between families and our center community?

Well, you're already doing something important: reading our newsletter. We try to limit the amount of information we pass on to parents, because we know you are busy.

But please do read what we post on bulletin boards or send home. We'll try our best to do our part: to communicate with you in a timely manner, to give accurate information, and to vary the ways we offer information.

Have you checked out our website lately? We are continuing to add features to enhance communication and provide resources for staff and families. Ask your child's teacher about their Myhouse page at www.gretchenshouse.com.

Beyond the social benefits, building a partnership with the center staff, especially your child's teacher, is a sure way to gain a better understanding of our curriculum, as well as to learn more about child development.

And we want to learn more from you, too. As the expert on your own child, you hold vital information that can make your child's experience in our program more positive, and make our teachers much more effective. We will share our general knowledge with you, and we count on hearing your specific observations about your child as well.

Curriculum night and center potlucks are also opportunities to build strong connections with your child's teacher, as well as with other families. You are building friendships and a support network that will go far beyond your years at Gretchen's House. You may see each other at the high school, before you know it!

Heidi McFadden



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Important Notes

Contracts for 2011

All currently enrolled families will receive a new child care contract for 2011 in November. These contracts reflect rates and days the centers will be closed for January-December, 2011.

Contracts for 2011 are due to the office by December 1. 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 23. Payments are due when centers reopen on January 3, 2011. Late fees will be assessed for payments made after Jan. 10.

Martin Luther King, Jr. Day – Centers Closed

Please take note that all Gretchen's House Centers will be closed on Monday, January 17, 2011. Just as we did this past January, staff will be busy with mid-year training; the day will replace three "work Saturdays" that were previously required of all staff. We appreciate parent support of our staff training time.

2010 Teacher of the Year

Congratulations to Laura Barker, who was presented the *Louise Kersey Teacher of the Year Award* for 2010! Laura is a head preschool teacher at our Oak Valley location.

The Teacher of the Year award is presented each year at our fall Work Day training. The award is named for Louise Kersey, who worked closely with Gretchen to open her first center 28 years ago. Louise was a teacher at GH-Mt. Vernon for over ten years, and she exhibited the qualities we now use as criteria for the award: long service and loyalty to Gretchen's, caring and concern for every child and staff

member, love of nature and commitment to the future of our environment, community outreach, enthusiasm, creativity, and sense of humor.

Teachers from every Gretchen's House nominate their coworkers, and the former Teachers of the Year choose the recipient from those recommendations. The Teacher of the Year receives a decorative pitcher (Louise collected pitchers) and framed certificates for home and work.

Past Teachers of the Year include Stephanie Russell (2009), Krista Kemp (2008), Erin Dixon (2007), Christine Snyder (2005), Kathy Lovernick (2004) Pam Preston (2003), Karen Clark-Cantu (2002), Amy Higgs (2000), Beth Renner (1999), Laura Griswold (1996), and Paige Sienko (1994).

School Photos - Date Reminder

Dhu Varren	10/6 & 7
Mt. Vernon	10/1
Mt. Pleasant	10/1
Oak Valley	10/19 & 20
Stadium	10/5
Traver	10/12
WISD	10/26

Curriculum Nights

Please join us for Curriculum Night at your center. This is a great opportunity to see the room and hear about our program without children present. In addition, teachers will have more information on the High/Scope approach, and what that looks like in our program.

Dhu Varren	
Infant/Toddler	10/26
Preschool/Young 5s ..	10/28
Mt. Vernon	10/7
Mt. Pleasant	10/5
Oak Valley	10/13
Traver	10/14
WISD	10/11



Upcoming Events

The **GH-Mt. Pleasant** center is inviting families to join us for a Harvest Snack and Parade on Friday, October 29th. Families can join us at the center at 3:30 for homemade snacks, cider and a walk through the neighborhood to visit the Mt. Vernon center.

Looking ahead to November, **GH-Traver** classrooms will host a food drive, make food for neighbors and have a friendship feast. Check your child's classroom for more specific details.

The Infant/Toddler and Preschool rooms at **GH-WISD** will host a Fall Harvest Festival on Thursday, November 11th, 3:30-4:30. Families will enjoy harvest treats made by the children, face painting by one of our preschool parents and more!

The **GH-Oak Valley** Harvest Festival will be on October 28th (during the day, time TBA).

GH-Dhu Varren will conduct fall parent phone conferences the week of Nov. 15th.



These staff members are celebrating Gretchen's House anniversaries this October and November!

	Years
Laura Barker	10
Sunita Pawar	9
Anu Narula	6
Debra Marsh	4
Julie Morrison	4
Brian Wiltse	3
Bethany Leonard	3
Michael Roller	3
Lauren Hood Hamstra	3
Susan Leonard	3
Shalese Campbell	3
Karin Nowak	3
Amanda McCreight	3
Danielle Grimaldo	2
Jacquelyn MacMillan	1

Neighborhood News

Thank you to all the **GH-Dhu Varren** parents and staff who supported the bake sale, lemonade stand and pancake breakfast that benefited the March of Dimes. We were able to provide them with a check for \$350.

The **GH-Mt. Pleasant** center has been working with HighScope Foundation as subjects in teacher training videos and photos for training materials. Photographers and videographers have come to the center to capture images of the teachers using the HighScope Curriculum in an infant/toddler child care setting. We look forward to sharing the photos and video with parents at our Curriculum Night in October.

GH-Traver staff and parents enjoyed the fall potluck. A taste of GH was the focus. Chili from the GH menu was served to families and in return families came with their own taste of food!

GH-Mt. Vernon welcomed new families as well as returning families to a new school year at their Fall Potluck. This year families were able to experience some international dishes. We enjoyed Asian noodles, pot stickers, meatballs, and spinach pies to name a few. Gretchen's House provided pizza and raspberry lemonade. The

weather was beautiful so families were able to eat outside and the children enjoyed playtime with their friends.

GH Dhu Varren and **GH-Stadium** had the opportunity to partner with HighScope for the purpose of taking photographs of Infants and Toddlers. With parents permission, the photos taken at our center will be used in a variety of HighScope publications, including the second edition of *Tender Care and Early Learning*, which will be published in the spring of 2011.

Staff News



On October 23, a team of 18+ Gretchen's House employees will walk in the Making Strides Against Breast Cancer walk at Gallup Park. If you are interested in making a donation you may go to cancer.org/stridesonline. Look for the Gretchen's House team and make your donation. Their team goal is \$2,000, and they are currently at the \$1,000 mark.

Kelly Potter attended the MiAEYC Infant/Toddler conference held in September.



Literacy at the Centers



It's fun to write and draw, and I learn more when I work with my friends. We talk about our ideas and help each other solve problems. (GH-Dhu Varren)



We're getting familiar with the letters on the board. It's fun to move them around and see how they're shaped. (GH-Mt Pleasant)



I used a lot of markers to write this letter to mom. I might have to read it to her. (GH-Mt Vernon)



I can even write on the very top, because I'm growing so tall! (GH-Traver)



I like listening to books with my teacher. Even the babies crawl over and listen! (GH-Mt Pleasant)



Chefs have to read the recipe and follow steps – important literacy skills! (GH-WISD)



I like signing in every day, just like my mom and dad! (GH-Mt Vernon)



When I write my name on the dry erase board, I can wipe it off and do it over again! (GH-Oak Valley)



Reading is fun: inside and out! (GH-Traver)



I'm reading all about trucks – a favorite subject of mine. (GH-Mt Vernon)



Writing in journals helps us look back and remember things that happened weeks ago. (GH-Dhu Varren)



When we work together on our big mural, we practice writing *and* our negotiating skills at the same time. (GH-Traver)



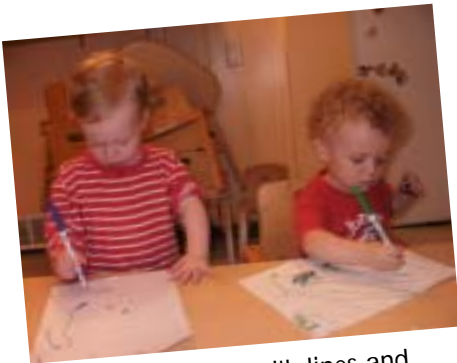
Cutting, measuring and writing take a lot of patience! (GH-Stadium)



The signs in our room help me learn to read and decipher symbols. (GH-WISD)



I like to read lying down. Even babies appreciate a good sub-plot! (GH-Mt Pleasant)



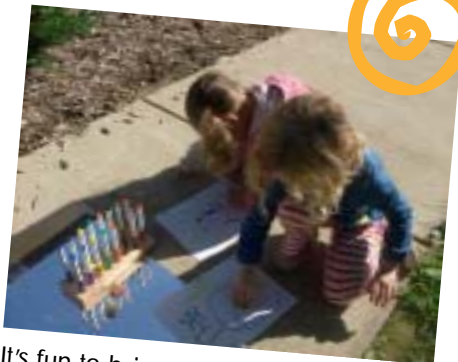
When I experiment with lines and shapes, I'm practicing my pre-writing skills. (GH-Mt Pleasant)



The "Alphabet Sticks" are a fun way to work with letters! (GH-Oak Valley)



Reading is fun-on-the-run! (GH-WISD)



It's fun to bring our work outside! (GH-Traver)



Exploring books with my friends, even the littlest ones, makes me look forward to reading. (GH-WISD)



Sorting and counting help me be a better reader later on. (GH-Dhu Varren)



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 6:15 p.m. Please contact Heike at Oak Valley to register: hampel@gretchenshouse.com or 734.327.6126.

Upcoming Classes at Oak Valley:

October 19
CPR/First Aid Initial

October 20
CPR Renewal

November 17
CPR/First Aid Initial

November 18
CPR Renewal

December 14
CPR/First Aid Initial

December 15
CPR Renewal

Change Happens

"First you iron the back of the collar," was the advice our mothers received about the proper order of ironing shirts. "That way if your iron's too hot, the scorch marks won't show. First press the collar. Then the shoulders, sleeves and back. Always do the front last." Good advice, and no doubt it was the same protocol their own mothers and grandmothers had been brought up on. But like so much else, the rules for unwrinkling shirts have changed. Now it's more useful to know how to operate the clothes dryer from a remote computer station.

Change is a certainty. And living comfortably with change is a skill our children can't do without.

People change jobs, homes, and friends almost as quickly as most parents can change a diaper—and that's usually pretty fast. Work itself changes. How can you prepare children to live in such a world?

Fortunately, there's an answer: Play—freely chosen and self-directed.

1. Play teachers children how to make choices? "Blocks or beads?" muses a four year old, gazing at a shelf of toys. "Which colors do I want? Shall I build a garage with them or load them in a dump truck? Should I ask Dylan or Michael to play or plan alone?"

Children who play are getting first-hand experience in making their own decisions. And that's important preparation for the future. The decisions in preschool may seem small, but just ask any teenager. The choices young people must make in a rapidly changing society are increasingly complex and serious.

2. Play teachers children how to create and consider new solutions. A three year old tries to stick two pieces of construction paper together. Her glue stick is empty.

Now what? She sticks out her tongue and tries licking one sheet. It doesn't make them stick. Neither does a dab of blue paint. She holds one piece of paper under running water, where it promptly dissolves. Undaunted, she finds a dry piece of paper and a small piece of play dough. Success!

It's an unconventional but effective solution to her problem. She learned more than how to stick two sheets of paper together. She discovered that there are many answers to a problem and to persist until she found one that worked. Piaget, the Swiss psychologist, pointed out that "creative imagination...does not diminish with age but it gradually reintegrated in intelligence."

We can't predict the changes our children will face in the future, but skill in searching for and finding creative solutions will be indispensable.

3. Play increases confidence and reduces stress. Young children are relatively powerless. Pretend play gives them a chance to be in charge of their own time and space. Instead of being told when to get in the car, they become the driver. Instead of having to finish their vegetables, they become the cook. And instead of going to bed early, they tuck everyone else in with a firm warning to stay there.

In all real play there's a strong sense of "I can do it—I can run, climb, invent, build." Play builds self-confidence, reduces stress, and enables children to face challenges feeling capable. What could be more important in a rapidly-changing world?

The ability to make wise choices, find creative solutions to problems, and to do so with confidence are skills that parents encourage whenever they protect their children's right to play.

*Reprinted from The Well-Centered Child,
January 2007*



Birthday Policy

We know that parents have a lot of information coming their way: notes home, newsletters, and children's artwork clutter our desks at home. *"I know they said something about birthdays, but I don't want to admit that I lost that note..."*

Below is an excerpt from our Birthdays Purple Page, with our policy:

"We'd like to explain our firm policy of **no birthday treats from home**. Some of our children and staff have food allergies and/or dietary restrictions which would exclude them from food-focused celebrations. Some food allergies are so severe, even traces of the food can be life-threatening. Monitoring all food that comes in and out of the center is a time-consuming task *and* difficult to control 100%. Also, while we believe occasional treats are fine for young kids, we do need to be careful—the number of children in our programs means we can sometimes have several birthdays in one week.

Sometimes parents ask to distribute small gifts or party favors at the center in honor of their children's birthdays. We have allowed this in the past but have decided to discontinue it for several reasons. Monitoring toys or small gifts for age-appropriateness becomes one more task on busy teachers' to-do lists and can become a financial burden for parents. *We will only provide celebrations that involve fun rituals and/or special privileges, and which focus on the **child** whose birthday it is.*

Many families choose to mark special occasions by donating a favorite children's book or game to the center. We graciously accept these donations as we would at any time of the year, but we will not make them a focus of the celebration.

Parents **may** use our center space after hours or on the weekend, free of charge, to host private birthday parties for their children. To reserve a space, speak with your center director well in advance. Invitations should be mailed (*not distributed in parent mailboxes*), so that children who are not invited do not feel left out. Parents must leave the center space clean, taking special care not to leave any traces of outside food."

Food From Home

Due to the serious nature of food allergies for many of the children in our programs, we have a strict "no sharing food from home" policy. (Please read the Birthday policy in this newsletter) In some of our programs (Scamp, school-age, WISD), children bring their lunches from home. That policy will continue; however, *we ask parents not to send peanut butter or other nut products in these lunches*. Teachers will not allow children to share lunches brought from home.

Please note that we serve breakfast every morning from approximately 8:00 – 8:20. If your child arrives late and has not eaten breakfast, please let one of the teachers know, and we will provide something for them. Please do not bring your child in with their breakfast from home. It is difficult for teachers to maintain a nut-free environment when children walk into the program, food in hand. In addition, children who arrive with food often want to join in the activities, spreading their food and germs throughout the room. We appreciate everyone's cooperation! Please see your child's teacher or the center director if you have questions.

Parent Advisory Group

Are you looking to get more involved in your center? Consider joining the Parent Advisory Group. The PAG mission statement:

To advise Gretchen's House on issues facing the GH community in a manner consistent with the best interests of children through a deliberative, inclusive, and participatory process.

The PAG meets bimonthly. Newcomers are welcome to sit in on a meeting or volunteer to help with various projects, if joining regularly isn't manageable for your family.

Please mark your calendars for November 4th, 6:30 pm, for our next PAG meeting. The meeting will be held at our Mt Vernon location. Child care will be provided, but we do need to know ahead of time if you need care.

Please email Heidi (heidi.mcfadden@gretchenshouse.com) with any requests for care by November 3.



...because learning should be fun!



Reading with teachers is fun – with friends or alone! Book time is special time together. We share ideas and talk about what might happen next! We think about why the characters say or do things a certain way. (GH-Dhu Varren)

Please turn to pages 4-5 for more pictures about literacy at Gretchen's House!



We made lemonade for the workers in front of our center.

They appreciated it very much! (GH-Stadium)

