

the tree

The newsletter for Families Together Cooperative Nursery School

Winter 2010



Family, culture and the classroom

By Chris Borud Porter
Education Director

A child's family and all the elements of culture that impact that family—heritage, religion, lifestyles, food, music, holidays and so on — are incredibly influential in his or her life. It is important that all children feel as though their family is represented and respected in their school environment, and that they experience and learn to value the diverse cultures, lifestyles and traditions of their classmates' families.

The teachers and I are working toward fostering this cultural awareness in our program. We feel that one meaningful way to achieve this is to invite you as assisting parents and guests in our classrooms to share information about your family's life and your experiences as a child in your family. We realize there is a wealth of opportunity for learning about differences by simply tapping into a resource we already have: you.

Here are a few things you can do to help us create a welcoming and diverse environment where children can learn to appreciate likeness and difference:

• **Answer questions** – The teachers and I have begun a list of questions that we may want to ask you with the children when you assist in the classroom. This is a way for us to get to know you and your family a little better and to expose the kids in the class to experiences they may or may not be familiar with. We will share the questions with

you ahead of time so you feel prepared.

• **Share stories** – Are there stories about your life or your childhood that you could tell the class? If so, talk to your child's teachers about that story and together you can find a time to share it with the children.

• **Share language** – If you or someone in your family speaks or is familiar with a language, would you be willing to share some words from that language with the class? Perhaps you could read a story, sing a song or share music in that language and then translate for the kids.

• **Read a book** – Is there a favorite book from your childhood or more recent that you would like to read to the class?

• **Share music** – Families listen to and play different kinds of music at home. Is there any music, instrument or song you could share with the class?

• **Share food** – Families eat different kinds of food at home. Is there any food you could share with the kids? Perhaps there is a cooking project you could lead? The food would have to comply with our allergy and DCFS guidelines.

If any of these ideas sound like ways for you to share some of your family's culture at school and contribute to our diversity and anti-bias efforts, we would very much appreciate your help.

Please talk with your child's teachers ahead of time so they can plan for your participation. If you have any other thoughts on this topic, please feel free to share them with me or the teachers.

FROM THE PRESIDENT...

Dear families,

Happy December! For me, the past three months have flown by — it feels like the first day of school was yesterday. My boys, on the other hand, already act as if they are experts at Kindergarten and 8:30 Nursery: they have simply been in their current classes “forever.” Their sense of ownership and belonging is inspiring. I credit their teachers and school leaders for creating routines and an environment that make them feel so connected to their school.

As parents at FTCNS, I hope that you are also feeling this sense of ownership and belonging—that we are doing a good job of welcoming and getting to know you and your family; that assist days are becoming easier and more second nature; that your role on your committee is clear; and most importantly, that you know your work as a volunteer, your contributions to our fundraising efforts, and your opinions, questions, and ideas are valued and critical to defining us as a school.

One way in which we welcome and connect a wide range of families to our unique cooperative preschool experience is through our sliding tuition scale and financial aid programs. The money that we raise through our current online auction directly ensures that the broadest possible community can become part of the fabric of Families Together. We are in the last few days of the auction—if you haven't already, please place your bids and let friends, family, and colleagues know about the auction and the importance of FTCNS in your child's life.

As a veteran FTCNS parent, I know that my own sense of connection to the school has evolved and deepened over time. Whether you are a new or veteran parent, please let me or other Board members know what we can do to enhance your sense of belonging, meet your family's needs, or help you to feel connected.

Have a wonderful holiday season!

-Laura Pinsof, Board President

School News

Reflections from my first fall at FTCNS

By Elizabeth Thasiah
9:00 Nursery teacher

As both teacher and parent within the Families Together Cooperative community, I shared my first day of school this year alongside my daughter Sophia as she entered the 8:30am Nursery class. This has been a unique and revelatory honor, to live in both worlds, witnessing the inquisitive minds of our children at play in the classroom and the continuation of this play at home.

My daughter, like many of your children, tells me nearly nothing of her day at play in school. I even have the "Cliff Notes" for asking key questions about the day. Nevertheless, at home in my shadow, her meandering play tells the story of her experiences and reflects how the creative nurture at school takes hold in the mind, flesh and spirit of a child—and grows.

Sophia's knowledge is imparted as she

grapples with imaginary conflicts between her stuffed animals and finds ways for them to make amends. Her recognition of her value is reflected in her drawings, as she asks me to write her words on her pictures and to read them back to her. The impact of daily ritual and community is expressed in her song, as she sings morning greetings to her bears and parents and calls out line partners to her hippos. These are all forms of language, a means of communicating and giving voice to the meaning and impact of her world, a world that has grown larger and more nuanced through the symbiotic relationship between school and home.

I am grateful and at times awed to be part of such a community of learners: parents, children and teachers all. We learn from and with each other, all emerging together to be what some would call family. Thank you for welcoming and including me in such a gift.

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at school takes hold in the
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COMMITTEE SPOTLIGHT

Teacher Support team focusing on families, community

Led by Mixed Age parent Lori Kristofka, the Teacher Support Committee works directly with our teachers to maintain the classroom, support the curriculum and help them achieve their professional goals.

Some of the teacher's goals this year are to better showcase student work and photos of students at play, better utilize the parent community, and reach out to our neighborhood businesses to improve the students' learning experience.

The committee is supporting the teachers' goals in many ways. They've redesigned the large classroom bulletin board with regular photo updates and will begin featuring student work from each class on a rotating basis.

They're using a parent-information database that highlights the professional skills and interests of each parent, making the information easily accessible for the teachers.

Later this month, they'll place a new "Wish List Tree" on the bulletin board in the lobby. They hope this increased visibility reminds our community of what our classrooms could use throughout the year.

Finally, they'll be making contacts with local businesses and organizations in the new year, with the hope of growing our community connections. Some of these contacts may invite the classes for a field trip or we may invite them to our school to share information with our children about their work.

Many thanks to the Teacher Support Committee for all they do to improve the classroom experience!

FAMILY SUPPORT

"Give a Little, Take a Little"

The Family Support & Social Committee is hosting a clothing/book/toy swap for FTCNS families — "Give a Little, Take a Little" — in the classroom at school on Friday, December 10, from 3:30-5:00.

To participate, please bring any or all of the following items that you no longer need or want to the swap:

- Gently used and cleaned children's clothing
 - Used children's shoes in wearable condition
- Gently used toys and children's books

In return you may find new toys, books and/or clothes and shoes for your family.

You can give as much or as little as you like and take whatever suits your fancy. Remaining items will be given to Care for Real.

There will be childcare upstairs in the gym as well as snacks and drinks downstairs for parents or caregivers. This event is limited to our Families Together community. It's a terrific way for us to share with one another during this season of giving. If it is a success the committee will consider another swap in the spring and extend invitations beyond the school.

Please reply to the Evite and contact Kathleen Bjurstrom with any questions at kmbjurstrom@yahoo.com.

Angel Tree benefits students of tutoring program

Each year the Family Support & Social Committee organizes a school wide community gift-giving event. This year we are participating in Immanuel Lutheran's Angel Tree to benefit students of the Edgewater Tutoring Program. Each angel hanging on the tree has a wish from a student for a gift that he/she wants this Christmas. To give, simply pick an angel off the tree

and return the wrapped gift to the church office by Sunday, December 12th. When leaving the gift, please write the child's name and your name and phone number on the sign up sheet in the church office.

The Angel Tree is also a mitten tree. Immanuel Lutheran is collecting and donating gently used mittens, hats and scarves to Care for Real and a local shelter.

Wish List

Until our new Wish List Tree is up, here's a reminder. As always, used items are welcome.

- ipod
- Legos (not Duplos)
- Low-light plants
- Alphabet letter stickers
- Air pump (foot type)

EVENTS



Thanks for making Fall Fest a success!

Our annual celebration was a big hit. With perfect weather, many of the activities were held outside: There were games, crafts and, of course, face painting (provided by Denise Milito-Stockwell and Nancy Zwick). Inside, families shared the wonderful food they brought and danced to live music provided by the Old Town School of Folk Music's Karen Banks-Lubicz.



Photos: Chitownkid.com

Save the dates

Tuesday, January 11

Mandatory parent meeting for all classes at 7:00 p.m. At this meeting you will be asked to sign up for either a toy cleaning or an open house. The school requests that all families participate in one of these three events. Please pick the event below that works best for your family and sign up beginning January 11.

Friday, January 28: Toy Cleaning from 9:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m.. Kids are welcome but they cannot stay in the classrooms. Volunteers will take them to the gym to keep them away from the cleaning supplies.

Saturday, January 29: Open House. You'll have two shifts to choose from: 9:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m. or 11:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. Kids are welcome.

Saturday, February 26: Open House. You'll have two shifts to choose from: 9:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m. or 11:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. Kids are welcome.

Saturday, April 9, 2011

Our school's annual fundraising gala will be held at Dank-Haus in Lincoln Square beginning at 7:00 p.m. Details to follow in the months ahead.

Attend a board meeting

All parents are invited, and encouraged, to attend the monthly board meetings.

If you want the scoop on how our school runs and where we're headed, then this is the place to be. Upcoming dates:

Monday, December 6, 7:00 p.m.

Monday, January 10, 7:00 p.m.

Monday, February 7, 7:00 p.m.

Board meetings are held at the school.

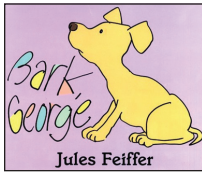
Want to see your event here?

To include your event or announcement in the FTCNS newsletter, contact Gretchen Muller, Communications Chair, at gmuller75@gmail.com.

BOOKS

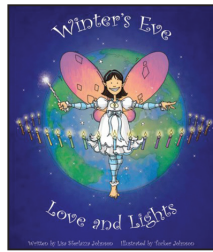
Lessons about unconditional love, diversity and growing up

Here are three recommendations from Deadre Lorber, our literacy teacher.



Bark, George
By Jules Feiffer

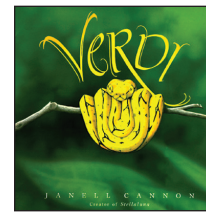
George is a dog who cannot bark. He can quack, oink and moo, but much to his mother's frustration he can't "arf." George's mom takes him to the vet who says "Bark, George." When he meows instead, the vet reaches into George's mouth, digs deep... and pulls out a cat! Other barnyard animals soon emerge from little George's mouth. Mom is so relieved! But the question remains: Is George cured? Kids and adults get lots of laughs from this tale, which offers brilliant illustrations and puts a creative twist on an old joke. The animal noises, repetition and depth of humor make it fun for ages 2 to 5.



Winter's Eve: Love and Lights

By Lisa Sferlazza Johnson
Illustrated by Tucker Johnson

Eve is a fairy who lives happily in a gray, chilly climate. This year, though, she finds herself longing for sunshine and having a case of "winter blues." An eternal optimist, Eve decides to lift her spirits by learning about different winter festivals that humans celebrate throughout the world — Diwali, Hannukah, St. Lucia's Day, Advent, Christmas, Los Posadas, Kwanzaa and Chinese New Year. An excellent story about how many cultures celebrate the onset of winter with light festivals. Recommended for ages 4 to 8.



Verdi
By Janell Cannon

Verdi is an adventure-seeking yellow python who loves his radiant looks and thinks adults — all green — are terribly boring. He's the Peter Pan of snakes and never wants to grow up.

One day he hurts himself and is nursed back to health by those dull green snakes. Verdi quickly learns that being older (and green) isn't so bad, and that lots of adults are still young at heart.

This story is beautifully illustrated and ends with source notes on the green tree python — perfect for reptile enthusiasts ages 3 to 8.

- All from online reviews

ACTIVITIES

Ways to beat the cold, or to simply get out and enjoy it

There's no escaping the chill over the next few months. Here's a list of places — besides home and school! — that the kids will enjoy all winter long.

INDOOR PLAY PLACES

Family Grounds Cafe

3652 N Lincoln Ave., Chicago
A "kid friendly" coffee shop on Lincoln Ave., just south of Grace. Adults can sip coffee and relax on comfy couches while the kids enjoy the large playspace. You can reserve a time online in the morning or come for open play in the afternoons. Closed Sundays. (\$10.95 first child, \$5.95 sibling rate).
www.familygroundscafe.com

Skokie Exploratorium

4701 Oakton St., Skokie
The Exploratorium has something to offer toddlers through age 8. There's a multi-level climbing structure, water play area, arts and crafts center, book corner, stage with dress-up clothes and more. Lots of free parking. Closed Thursdays and Sundays. (\$5 per non-resident child and adult; under 1 free).

Fantasy Kingdom

1422 N. Kingsbury, Chicago
Drop in play center near North

and Clybourn area, for ages 6 months to 6 years. (\$12 per child)
www.fantasykingdom.org

Pump It Up

821 W. Eastman, Chicago
While mostly reserved for parties and private events, this "inflatable party zone" also offers "Pop-In Playtime Pre-K" for children 42" and shorter. Hours and admission costs vary.
www.pumpitupparty.com

LOCAL MUSEUMS

We're lucky to have lots of outstanding choices for children in Chicago, from the Children's Museum at Navy Pier to Shedd Aquarium across from Grant Park and the Museum of Science and Industry on the south side. Check our last newsletter for free museum dates and your local library for a free pass for four admissions.

The library passes may be checked out for a week at a time. It's also a great time of year to purchase a membership to your favorite

museum. Better yet, have a grandparent buy one as a gift!

INDOOR WATERPARKS

Stay for the day, or for the entire weekend.

Key Lime Cove

1700 Nations Dr., Gurnee, IL
The best waterpark for a day trip.
www.keylimecove.com

Paradise Landing

509 W. Wisconsin Ave., Milwaukee, WI
A 20,000-square-foot waterpark located inside Milwaukee's downtown Hilton. Only open on weekends.
www.paradiselanding.com

Wilderness Waterpark Resort

The Dells is full of waterparks and this has been ranked the best by many. There are actually four separate indoor waterparks in the resort. By the way, moms: If you can escape, we hear there is a really great spa nearby.
www.wildernessresort.com
www.sundarspa.com

SLEDDING

Yes, there are hills in Chicago! There are designated sledding

locations at these nearby parks:

Warren Park: Western Ave. and Pratt Ave., Chicago

James Park: Intersection of Oakton and Dodge, Evanston

Indian Road Woods: Central Ave, 1/2 mile south of Caldwell, Chicago

Jensen Slides Area: Devon and Milwaukee Ave., Chicago

Flick Park: 3600 Glenview Rd., Glenview

ICE SKATING

Warren Park (6601 N. Western Ave.), \$6 skate rental, admission free

McFetridge Sports Center (3843 N. California Ave.), \$5 admission, \$4 admission for 12 and under

Daley Bicentennial Plaza (Grant Park, 337 E. Randolph St.), \$7 skate rental, admission free; learn to skate classes offered for ages 3-12

Millennium Park (Michigan Ave., between Washington and Madison), free admission, \$10 skate rental

Riis Park (6100 W Fullerton Ave.), \$6 skate rental, admission free