

THE PARISH POST

Summer 2023

Play!
at Parish

Donor Spotlight:
**FORDHAM
FAMILY**

3rd Annual
BIKE-A-THON

CARRUTH RESEARCH
on Childhood Apraxia



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Our Mission

The Parish School exists to empower children who have communication delays and learning differences to thrive through whole-child education, innovative therapy and access to nature.

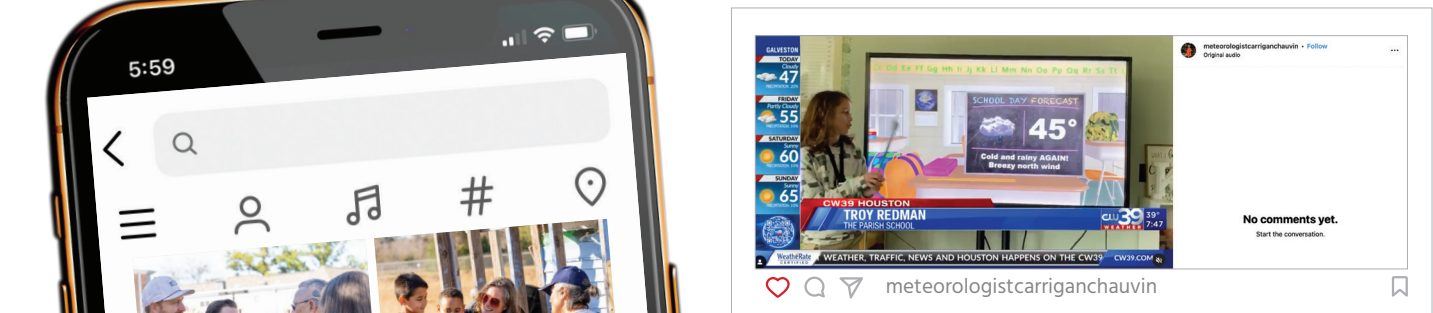
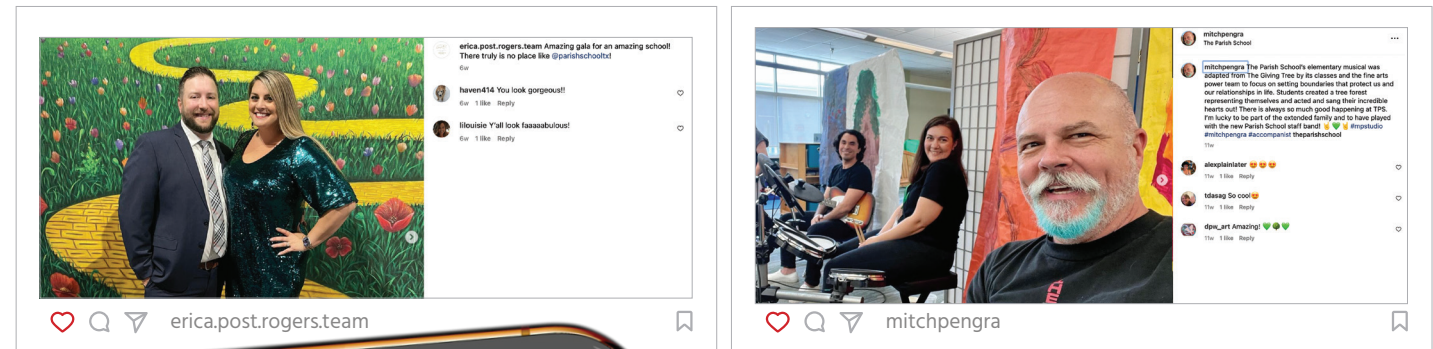
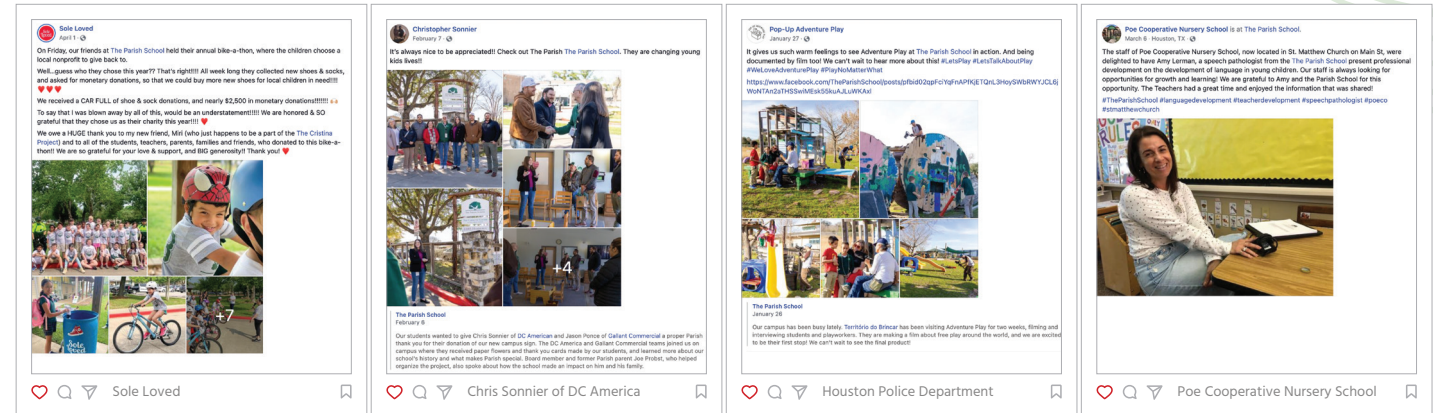
The Parish Post is printed twice a year and is published by The Parish School for students, parents, alumni and friends. For information or questions regarding The Parish Post, please contact the Advancement Office: advancement@parishschool.org

CHECK IT OUT



#TheParishSchool

We love to see what our families and supporters are up to! Use the hashtag above on social media to share your favorite Parish moments and photos with us. Photos may be published here in the Parish Post!



@TheParishSchool



@Parishschooltx



@ParishSchoolTX

LETTER

From the Head of School
Anne Powers



DEAR PARISH SCHOOL COMMUNITY,

As I reflect on the 2022-2023 school year, I am once again in awe of how incredible our students are and how hard they work to achieve their goals. I am grateful for an incredibly dedicated staff, the families who have become partners in this journey, and for our supportive Board of Trustees. Spring was very busy at The Parish School as we welcomed many visitors to campus for parties, Garden Days, musicals, and Bike-A-Thon. Our community gathered to support our mission and the school at the 30th annual Gala. The theme of “There is No Place like Parish” was very appropriate because the sentiment rings true for me. I see our students grow and conquer new challenges each and every day in our classrooms and on the playgrounds.

Play is an important aspect of development and our curriculum at The Parish School. Play is a child’s work and protecting time for play is something we value. We have invested greatly in our redesigned playgrounds and outdoor learning spaces, and they have been recognized as Certified Nature Explore Outdoor Classrooms. Our afterschool and summer program, Adventure Play, provides a safe environment for children to engage in self-directed free play where children have opportunities to make mistakes and learn from them, be leaders and learn how to follow others, and learn other important life skills. I am excited for you to read more about the “art of play” at The Parish School through this issue of The Parish Post.

As I look forward to the 2023-2024 school year, I truly believe Robbin Parish and Margaret Noecker would be very proud of what The Parish School has become since its founding in 1983. This year, I am excited to celebrate the school’s 40th anniversary with our community through several fun events, including the return of the Mighty Oak Bash next Spring. More information will be available soon, and we would love to have as many alumni, students, families, and former staff members join us in this yearlong celebration.

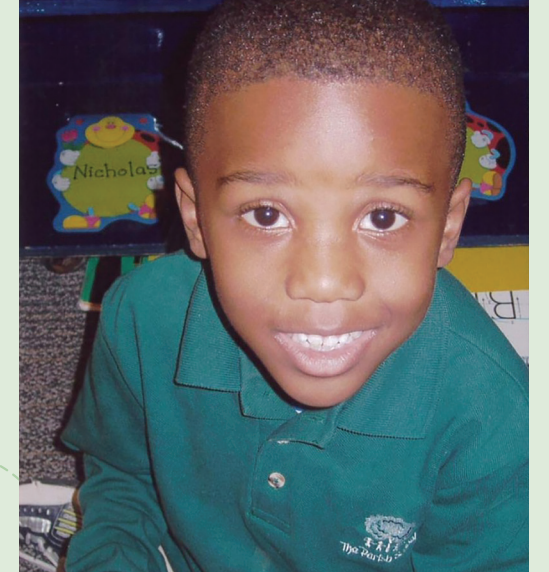
I wish you the very best for the remainder of summer and I hope you enjoy this issue of The Parish Post.

SINCERELY,

Anne

Head of School

Alumni CARL HAYES



The Parish School recently received an email update from Renee Hayes, mother of Carl Hayes. With her permission, we thought we’d share this with you.

I am very proud to announce that Carl has graduated from college. Thanks a thousand times over to all of his teachers and the staff at The Parish School. His attendance at Parish gave him the foundation that he needed to grow academically and socially. We are so grateful that he had the opportunity to be taught by such a vibrant, engaging, and experienced staff. Please know that Parish has been a blessing to our family and we are wholeheartedly thankful that Carl was a student there. That being said, Carl’s journey was very challenging, but in spite of all his challenges, obstacles, and financial roadblocks, he continued to be optimistic and enthusiastic about the future. I learned firsthand how resilient Carl is. He learned to focus on the things he could control so he made school his priority and stayed dedicated to his studies. As far back as I can remember, Carl has always been intrigued by the complexity of the brain and science. In high school, he always wanted to immerse himself in books that let him explore the amazing neurological connections of the brain. In addition, as a teenager, he attended a youth summer program at the local medical school called Camp Neuro. He learned about the nervous system, neuron physiology, tied surgical knots, dissected a sheep brain, and performed a virtual autopsy. As a result, his aspiration is to become a Neurosurgeon. Over the years, his relentless curiosity and exploration of the sciences led him to neuroscience. Now, I am extremely proud to announce that in the spring of 2023, Carl graduated from Furman University with a Bachelor of Science degree in Neuroscience. His educational goal is to take a gap year and engage in a summer research program and study for the MCAT simultaneously. Subsequently, complete four years of medical school followed by a residency training program. Then become a board-certified Neurosurgeon so that he can practice in this highly respected and challenging profession. I am so proud of Carl. He has come a long way, but he still has a long way to go.

Best Regards,

RENEE HAYES

IF YOU HAVE AN ALUMNI STORY TO SHARE, PLEASE CONTACT ADVANCEMENT@PARISHSCHOOL.ORG.



SAVE THE DATES

First Day of School
Tuesday, August 15

Apraxia Walk
Saturday, September 30

Fall Garden Day
Saturday, September 23

Fall Luncheon
Thursday, October 5

Fall Festival
Saturday, October 21

Grandparents Day
Friday, November 3

Gala
Saturday, February 3, 2024

Might Oak Bash (Alumni Event)
Saturday, April 20, 2024

Spring Garden Day
Saturday, March 23, 2024



Lower Elementary Performance

Lower Elementary students performed Aesop's Fables, culminating their Culture in Focus study of Greece. From costume design and story creation, to stage presence and delivery, the students blew away the crowd with their skills and creativity.



Fashion Show

Our Pre-Primary classes held a Paper Bag Fashion Show! The Dinosaurs and Armadillos wowed the crowd with their creative designs. What an excellent way to wrap-up their unit on clothing!



Field Day

After a year of hard work, lower and upper elementary students celebrated with some outdoor fun! Each class participated in various field day activities yesterday and then wrapped up with a snow cone treat!



Commencement

Congratulations to the ten Parish students our community celebrated at Commencement! We are incredibly proud of each and every one of you and cannot wait to see what you go on to accomplish!



Meteorologists

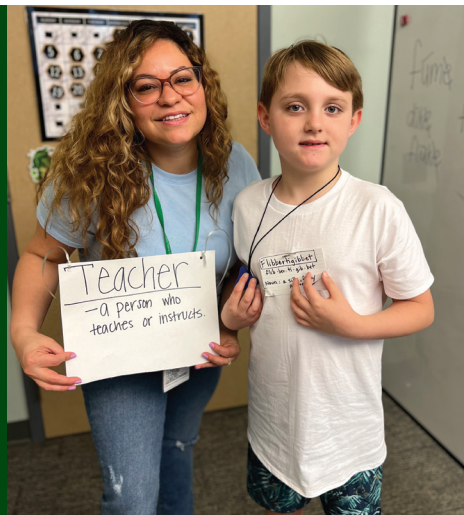
Students from our Kangaroos class were featured as TV meteorologists on the morning @cw39houston show!

You can watch their weather reports by scanning the QR Code:



Spring Musical

Upper Elementary students performed their Spring Musical "The Giving Tree." The Wildflowers and Ravens performed the original version of Shel Silverstein's children's book, while the Kangaroos and Avengers performed adapted versions to the story. The students all did a wonderful job!



Book Fair Week

As part of Book Fair Week, students celebrated Dictionary Day. We asked families to help their child choose an interesting word, then "wear" their word to school. Our students and staff had some very creative costumes!



Staff Celebration

Parish staff celebrated the end of the school year with a wonderful lunch donated by the Cokinos family. We also celebrated longtime paraeducator Melinda Millar for her 20 years of service and retirement by dedicating the turtle garden in her honor.

Camp for All

Upper Elementary students returned to Camp For All for an overnight trip for the first time since the pandemic. The campers were so brave, whether it was swinging on the Giant Swing, riding a horse, catching (and kissing!) fish, or singing in the recording studio. It was great to see how they all encouraged one another to try new things.



New Goats

Meet our resident goats! Parker and Brandon spent the rest of the school year with us out on Adventure Play! They are really sweet and love our students!



Recognizing Outstanding Parish & Carruth Team Members

The Parish School is unique and innovative thanks to our amazing team of teachers, paraeducators, therapists, and administrators. Each brings their own unique skills and talents to our school and clinic to transform the lives of children who have communication delays and learning differences.

Every year, the staff vote for the employees who stand out as going above and beyond, demonstrating the school’s core values of creativity, nurture, passion, ethical, and people. We are excited to celebrate the following exemplary staff members who were selected as The Parish School and The Carruth Center’s 2022-23 employees of the year.



Laura Causey, MAT
TEACHER OF THE YEAR

“Laura embodies the Parish mission and spirit every day. She is always willing to lend a helping hand to others and supports her team and students in many ways. She makes sure that her students have a voice and that they feel a part of the Parish community. We are in awe of the way she graciously and fearlessly stepped away from her role as Curriculum Specialist and took on the role of lead teacher. She was just what the students needed to help them finish off the year successfully.” - HAYLEY BOASMAN, Head of Elementary



Allie Lange
PARAEDUCATOR OF THE YEAR

“Allie is a natural when it comes to caring for our young learners at The Parish School. Allie excels in connecting and playing with her students. She has formed excellent relationships not only with her students, but with her teaching team as well. She works hard every single day to give The Gardeners the best care possible and it is clear that they love her. She is helpful, enthusiastic, kind, welcoming, nurturing and an overall delightful person.” - MADDIE WRIGHT, Early Childhood Coordinator



Nancy Mosely
ADMIN OF THE YEAR

“Nancy is the glue that holds everything together and keeps The Parish School running smoothly. From arranging substitutes to scheduling parent observations, helping out wherever needed, and everything in between Nancy does it all. She knows each child and parent by name, and they all love her. Anyone that has come to Parish in the last 30 years knows Nancy. She makes an impact each day and we are grateful for her.” - ANNE NEAL, Head of Early Childhood



Wendy Wiseman, M.S., CCC- SLP
CLINICIAN OF THE YEAR

“Wendy Wiseman boomeranged back to The Parish School and Carruth Center in late 2021. Wendy is a collaborative master clinician who has the passion and expertise to help children feel successful and gain new skills through fun and engaging activities. She exudes the kind of warmth and kindness that helps families understand and accept their child’s struggles as well as recognize their amazing strengths.” - MIMI BRANHAM, Clinic Director

Celebrating THE 2022-23 VOLUNTEERS OF THE YEAR!

An important annual Parish tradition is to celebrate the parents and volunteers for their support of the school this past year. From helping in classrooms to organizing events to beautifying our campus, there are so many people that make this school better - our room parents, event chairs, office helpers, and more. Please join us in wishing them each a sincere “thank you” for supporting our school and students.

At the event, our PTO President Ellen Conner and Vice President Margaret Farnsworth presented a check to the school for over \$20,000 from the annual PTO fundraisers. We also announced our annual award winners, and they are:



Joe Probst
BOARD MEMBER OF THE YEAR



Jennifer (not pictured) and Tim Pope
ABOVE AND BEYOND AWARD



Lori and Philip Luna
VOLUNTEERS OF THE YEAR



PLAY *at Parish*

Play is a fundamental aspect of human nature that transcends age, culture, and time. From childhood games to adult hobbies, play holds a significant place in our lives, fostering creativity, promoting learning, and bringing joy. Whether it's through structured activities or spontaneous moments of fun, play holds the key to unlocking our fullest potential and embracing a life filled with imagination, discovery, and fulfillment.

At The Parish School, we believe that play is an essential component of a child's growth and development. It serves as a vehicle for learning, socialization, and the development of essential life skills. Through play, children explore the world around them, experiment with different roles, and learn to solve problems creatively. Play allows them to develop their motor skills, enhance their cognitive abilities, and foster emotional resilience. Whether engaging in imaginative play, physical games, or cooperative activities, children learn valuable lessons about teamwork, empathy, and self-expression. Furthermore, play provides a safe space for children to make sense of their experiences, express their emotions, and develop their sense of identity.

"While there are plenty of wonderful opportunities in children's lives designed and made available by adults, it's important to distinguish things that are playfully taught, or guided, from child or self-directed play, times when children can dive deep into their own experiences, try things out, falter, or even fail without people watching or commenting," says Jill Wood, The Parish School's Director of Adventure Play. "Where they can feel all of the complex things that growing entails, like boredom, risk-taking, standing up for themselves and others, or deciding when to opt out of something altogether."

"While there are plenty of wonderful opportunities in children's lives designed and made available by adults, it's important to distinguish things that are playfully taught, or guided, from child or self-directed play, times when children can dive deep into their own experiences, try things out, falter, or even fail without people watching or commenting."

- Jill Wood, The Parish School's Director of Adventure Play

At Parish, we prioritize this by having protected recess times in Elementary that are staffed by trained playworkers. We are one of just a handful of institutions in the entire country with staff trained in playwork, an approach that focuses on and protects a child's perspective and experience. Playwork was developed on adventure playgrounds in the United Kingdom in the 1960s and has extended its reach in response to the decline in children's play opportunities caused by various societal changes over the past six decades. Factors such as busier streets, a rise in adult-organized after-school activities, increased screen time, and a reduction in accessible neighborhood resources like supervised parks have contributed to this decline. In the UK, playworkers can now be found in schools, hospitals, parks, museums, and even in instances where communities temporarily close down streets to create designated play spaces, known as play streets. This expansion of Playwork illustrates its adaptability and commitment to ensuring children have ample opportunities for play in a variety of contexts.

Elementary students at Parish have two recesses per day staffed by playworkers who provide supplies like fabric, shovels, and items pulled from the recycling bin such as boxes, empty plastic containers, and cardboard tubes. We refer to these materials as loose parts, materials that aren't precious, that are full of possibility and give the children permission to use them however they choose. The most classic example of a loose part is a cardboard box, which is often more interesting than the gift inside.

Those recesses are never taken away punitively or replaced with adult-directed activities. Our paraeducators are trained in the basics of playwork, so they too understand that this time belongs to the children. That doesn't mean adults aren't there to support, instead all playworkers and paraeducators help and play with children when asked. However, they just wait to be asked or observe closely to see when a child needs help but doesn't yet have the self-advocacy skills or language to ask. The playworkers at Parish, Wes Hamner and Noah Price, staff our recess along with paraeducators. Wes and Noah are not only formally trained in playwork, but they spend hours supporting play on our after-school adventure playground, so they draw from a deep well of experience."

Child-directed play is inherently empowering as it belongs exclusively to children, encompassing both its content and evolutionary aspects. This ownership of the play process becomes especially crucial for children with communication delays and learning differences, as it enables them to manifest their ideas utilizing their unique strengths. While

the conventional path from point A to point B may typically involve a three-step process, our students discover innovative approaches that may entail four or five steps or even substitute one step with another that aligns better with their skill set. These alternative methods or workarounds are not confined to a specific setting. When a child takes ownership of a process and successfully tailors it to their preferences, they carry that confidence into various aspects of their lives beyond the playground. Despite the challenges and complexities that arise within a playground setting alongside 40 other children, the valuable lessons learned throughout the journey resonate deeply and can be effectively applied in diverse contexts.

At Parish, adults create a nurturing environment where children can freely explore without excessive judgment. Within this space, the most significant influence lies in shaping a child's self-perception, as they have the opportunity to experiment alongside their peers and determine what is worth advocating for, what challenges are worth overcoming, and what is not worth their time and energy. Although this may appear trivial, understanding how to allocate limited resources and energy becomes essential, especially in the context of a school day that can be challenging for students with learning differences. This process of prioritization necessitates self-awareness in relation to the world and the ability to discern what holds true significance.



Adventure Play

From its inception, Parish has consistently placed emphasis on recess as an integral part of the educational journey, considering it as an extension of the classroom and a valuable opportunity for students to further their learning experience, particularly in terms of social development. Rather than being viewed as a break from teaching, Parish teachers leverage recess to assist students in conflict resolution and teach important skills such as how to approach a group of peers engaged in a game and ask to join. Recess becomes a platform where valuable lessons are imparted, reinforcing the school's commitment to a holistic and inclusive educational environment.

The original campus provided much less space for the students to spread out and truly explore. When the school moved to the current campus in 2005, the 17-acres were a perfect landscape for play.

In the fall of 2007, the head of school, Margaret Noecker, approached Jill Wood with a request to join Parish on a full-time basis and establish an after-school program. Prior to this, Jill had been working as a part-time librarian at Parish. Margaret, envisioning the development of an adventure playground, presented Jill with a substantial white notebook that she had received during her time serving on the advisory board of the Houston Adventure Play Association.



“We know that when children are immersed in their play and go deeper into their ideas and explorations, they are more relaxed, flexible, and creative. So the more time, the more benefit,” says Jill. “I have grown passionate about this work because I see how quickly children grow into their strengths and tackle challenges when they have protected time and space.”

- Jill Wood

“The first year we had a small but mighty group of eight Parish students who had free use of Parish’s southwest three acres, a designated flood plain,” says Jill. “We now serve 65 children from both the school and the Houston community and have filled the space with child-made structures and other features requested by the children, like a zipline and a giant hammock.”

Developing a strong sense of self in relation to others takes a long time. There are a few differences between recess at Parish and Adventure Play (AP). The most noticeable is visual; Adventure Play has temporary structures and Parish recess structures are permanent. The three-acre play-area of AP contains a zip-line, shade structures, and various scavenged construction materials that give the play area a unique look when compared to most playgrounds. Another impactful difference is time. While children have hours to spend on AP after school, they have recess for 45 minutes each day.

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Although Jill humbly credits others for the success of our recess and AP program, she has been vital to the creation and evolution of both programs. “The AP team is essential,” says Jill. “There are six of us adults

“AP is a avenue where the kids get the opportunity to discover the magic in themselves. A place where creativity flourishes and friendships are made Ap helps bring out the leader in each of them. A safe place where you can be yourself. It is joyful place”

-Maritza Medrano

working with the children and we reflect daily on how to adjust and improve our site. And of course our heads of school said ‘yes’ to a lot of unorthodox ideas I’ve brought to them. So much of what guides our AP site and recess stems from playworkers in the United Kingdom who have written about their experiences and shared them since the 60s”.

Longevity of the staff members is also an incredible strength when building a program like AP. In all, the playworkers have a combined 36 years of experience. Maritza Medrano, the longest serving playworker after Jill, joined Parish in 2015 and was the first member to complete the Playworker Development Course.

Promoting Play Across The Country

Parish’s playworkers have quietly become experts in their field. Hosting play advocates and playworkers several times a year and presenting at conferences or other engagements on the importance of play. Some are from established sites like the playground on Governor’s Island in NYC, who had two playworkers visit in February, while others are people starting play projects in their communities with goals of opening an adventure playground, or just professionals in Houston wanting to bring more play onto their campuses and classrooms. Jill also ventures away from campus to speak at local or national events. From presenting at the National Playwork Conference and the US Play Coalition Conference to speaking to parents at other Houston schools about child directed play, Jill dedicates much of her life advocating for more play in children’s lives all around the globe.

Wes recently earned his PARS PPP2 qualification, a model of playwork that is based on research conducted around the original playworkers on the earliest adventure playgrounds. It is offered through an organization called Common Threads in the UK. He is currently in the process of completing the PPP4 qualification, which once completed will make him one of just a handful of US based PARS trainers.

In the UK, where Playwork was originally developed, one can go all the way to earning a PhD in the field. On the other hand, in the US it is a relatively new discipline and only recently have extensive formalized training programs been developed. AP at Parish is still one of only five Adventure Playgrounds in the country.



“The PPP4 course will allow me to deliver the qualification to other, new playworkers,” says Wes. “I will be able to train playworkers in a model that very closely aligns with our own method of approach to playwork.”

International Recognition

Last January, Brazilian filmmakers David Reeks and Renata Meirelles visited Parish, filming and interviewing students and playworkers on Adventure Play. David and Renata are traveling the globe, documenting play and how it is portrayed around the world with a goal to release a feature-length documentary about free-play. Their first stop on their tour was Parish and they spent two weeks capturing the action on AP and interviewing both playworkers and students.

David and Renata chose AP at Parish because it stood out as an organization that prioritized free play and its inclusion of neurodiverse children. “That’s not saying free play doesn’t happen in other circumstances, but these are usually isolated within family settings, or in very rural settings,” says David. “So for this documentary about free-play around the world, we set our sights on Adventure Plays to represent “Western Civilization” and we chose Houston for that reason.”

When reflecting on their time at Parish, David acknowledged the impact that free play has on neurodiverse children and how that freedom positively affects them. “One thing that was really surprising was how hard it was to distinguish between the Parish children and the community children,” says David. “Renata and I have been researching free play for over 20 years, and one thing that is constant in all free play situations is that children are living up to their full potential, or at least striving to. In play, they have a chance to become whole, they are defining who they are, what they need, what they want, and what they don’t want. They’re digesting and experimenting with the world around them. So, when you see kids with that freedom, it’s hard to see their personal challenges/diagnosis because they are showing us their best: on their own terms.



“In turn we hope this will lead to adults who see a wider range of processes and ways of feeling and communicating as valid. I hope we draw more children from off campus to our playground after school so that there are more adults who understand the breadth of ways there are to be in the world.”

– Jill Wood, The Parish School’s Director of Adventure Play

Their next stop will be a small island off the coast of Mozambique, and although they are still choosing the other locations, their goal is to visit continents and areas that have an array of climates and geographies.

Eventually David and Renata plan to release a feature-length documentary about Free-play around the world as a sequel to *The Territory of Play*, a documentary they released in 2015 about the vast geography of children’s gestures in the most diverse areas in Brazil.

Although they have more traveling, filming, and editing to do before they release the next documentary, they are premiering the short institutional film about Adventure Play at The Parish School through this issue of The Parish Post. Scan the QR code below to watch.

Looking Forward

As AP continues to increase their enrollment, especially to non-Parish students, the benefits of an integrated setting where children with and without communication delays and learning differences share space and build a community are ever present. While Parish students pick up wonderful pieces of children’s culture from our community kids, our students are normalizing their creative and unique ways of doing things.

“In turn we hope this will lead to adults who see a wider range of processes and ways of feeling and communicating as valid,” says Jill. “I hope we draw more children from off campus to our playground after school so that there are more adults who understand the breadth of ways there are to be in the world.”



Advocating for More Play Time

Last May, Jill Wood taught Adventure Play students about the United Nations Committee on the Right of the Child. This committee is a collection of 18 independent experts whose goal is to inspire governments around the world to change laws and policies so more children get the healthcare and nutrition they need.

After the learning portion, AP students submitted questions to the United Nation’s Vice Chair of Children’s Rights, Philip Jaffe, in hopes that their question would be selected to be asked at the International Play Association’s annual conference in Glasgow, Scotland. One Parish student’s question was selected.

“Is there anything we can do as children to make it so other children in the world have enough time to play?” Colton Ivie, 10, Houston, TX, US

Colton Ivie joined Parish in 2018 in the Astronauts class. During his time on campus, Colton has learned a great deal about play, especially when it comes to making new friends. “Playing at Parish has taught me how to learn that with playing I get to make new friends by playing with everyone, and that sometimes we play things that other kids might not want to play but we play together anyways. I’ve learned new games because of playing with other friends,” says Colton.

When asked what his favorite game to play was, Colton says “freeze tag! It’s when you play tag but if you get tagged you have to freeze in your spot. Then someone else can come and tag me so I’m not frozen anymore and can play tag again.”

Being selected for such an important honor is not lost on Colton and his family. “Chris, myself, our family friends and I know our superhero leaders at Parish are extremely proud of Colton,” says Kelly Ivie, Colton’s mother. “He truly realizes what an honor all of these moments mean and he’s quite humble about it all. It’s been such a moving experience for us all.”

After the IPA annual conference, Dr. Jaffe will write back to Colton on how his question was answered. We look forward to hearing what he has to say.



In January, The Parish School became the new temporary home for two goats, Brandon and Parker from Rent-A-Ruminant, a Texas company that rents goats as an eco-friendly vegetation management solution. The two spent the second half of the school year, living on Adventure Play in a special goat pen built by Wes, Patrick, and Sam.

Parish students love interacting with the friendly goats, but one student found an opportunity to do more. Miles Hinton, an Upper Elementary student in the Travelers class, appointed himself the Shepherd of the Goats one day in Adventure Play. When asked why he wanted to take on the role, Mile answered “because it was calming”.

While other students played on AP, Miles would spend his time feeding and training the goats. “I trained the goats and gave them goat treats. I gave them invasive trees as treats and they loved it,” said Miles. “I made sure the goats didn’t pee in the sand pit and the deck.”

Although taking care of the goats was calming for Miles, Jill Wood and the other playworkers noticed other impacts from this new role. “We noticed that Miles became more confident in himself, and that confidence made an impact in other areas of his life on campus,” said Jill.

Miles also noticed the change in himself. “I felt proud and confident about myself,” he added.

The goats will spend the summer back in Brownswood to rejoin the herd to take a break from the heat, but will come back to campus in August. Miles already plans on reclaiming his role as the Shepherd of the Goats when they return to campus next year, adding “so I can protect them.”

Miles not only loves taking care of the goats, but he also raises fire ants and other species of ants at home. You can follow his ant raising journey on his YouTube channel by scanning the QR code:



The Fordham Family DONOR SPOTLIGHT

“Grateful Parents Paying It Forward As Family Closes Their Parish Chapter”

Jill Wood, The Parish School’s Adventure Play director, received an email on May 18, 2023, that completely shocked, amazed, and overjoyed her in the best possible way. With permission from the author of the email, we would like to share it with you.

“

Jill, Wes & Noah,

It’s so difficult to think this is the last AP week for Aiden, while he is at Parish. John & I have found ourselves mourning the ending of this season where our Aiden has been loved, nurtured, and grown through his play and work at AP. Your program has given Aiden so many social muscles he never had the chance to develop earlier in his life.

We first began at Parish mid-year five years ago. We were trying to muddle through learning a new school and trying to figure out what was best for Aiden’s learning, growth, and development. Needless to say, it was an overwhelming time for our whole family. It was during this time that another parent stated with conviction, “Hey y’all need to do AP!” John and I had no idea what AP was, but this parent’s enthusiasm convinced us we should investigate. So we asked about “AP”, having no idea what it was- and had no idea how it would impact our son and family. We were directed to Jill and learned AP stood for Adventure Play and learned some about the program. John and I were all in (although honestly, we didn’t really get it, nor did we know how much Aiden needed it). The only thing preventing us from enrollment was the cost of the program. Financially things were very uncomfortable for us. Our family had just moved homes and now schools, on top of which we had some exorbitant medical expenses for Aiden. We were at a crossroads, as our desire was to provide everything we could to help Aiden - but our desires didn’t match our available funds. We were crunching numbers, trying to make it work- somehow. It was at this point that we were told AP was able to offer a scholarship to Aiden to attend AP. Honestly, we don’t remember if the scholarship was partial or complete in covering the cost. What we do remember is, **the scholarship made all the difference in the world for us to be able to provide another opportunity for Aiden to learn, be nurtured and to grow.** AP and all the playworkers helped Aiden to have social interactions that he never had the chance to have previously. We immediately saw growth and development in him. We were sold! Anything that AP needed we wanted to try to help with. Anything AP was doing we were a “yes, sign us up!” We watched him grow and have deep connections with friends, run laugh play, have different ideas, learn about unexpected moments in friendships and what to do. It was miraculous! Then Covid hit. Our family, self-isolated for 18 months, and watched Aiden disappear and regress — our hearts were broken. We felt hopeless and desperate. When Aiden’s physician gave us the ok to have him back at school in person, we knew that AP was a must! Re-entry was tough at first, but before too long our Aiden returned. To our joy he regained the development we thought was lost, and to our delight he thrived to further develop emotionally and socially.

- It is here that he learned how to invite people to play with him, instead of playing alone.
- It is here that he learned how to have a different plan without it being the end of the world.
- It is here that he learned how to be concerned about friends and put his desire to help into action.
- It is here he learned how to be brave and try something new and survive and thrive when things don’t go according to plan.
- It is here he learned how to repair a friendship when the unexpected happens, to take ownership for mistakes, to extend forgiveness and grace.
- It is here that he embraced his desire to explore, discover and try new things with new friends.
- It is here that he learned so much is possible, and so much is waiting for him to experience it.
- It is here he knows he belongs, is loved and can be a leader.
- It is here Aiden has learned it is wonderful to be Aiden.

As you can see, because of AP our son has been given the tools to grow and thrive, and our family has been forever changed. Because of someone else’s generosity our family was blessed, so we would like to offer a blessing to another family in need. We would like to offer a partial scholarship for a new student to AP. To give someone an opportunity who might not be able to participate otherwise. We would like to offer a scholarship for 50% of the cost to enroll in AP for the 2023-2024 school year. We hope you will be free to offer it to whomever you think might benefit.

We will never be able to express our profound gratitude to each of you. This is a very small expression of our deep and immeasurable gratitude. We hope this will be a life-changing blessing to a family as it was to ours. Adventure Play is a place where miracles happen!

Never have such small words been used to express such an enormous message: “Thank you!”

We are so very grateful to each of you,

Leah & John Fordham

A portion of Jill’s written response back stated, “I will treasure this note forever and think it may be the most perfect gift of all. Being part of Aiden’s play has been inspiring for all of us, particularly the last year or so, when we saw him putting the many pieces together to land the connections he wanted. It takes enormous bravery to reach out when you know the results aren’t in your control, but we’ve seen Aiden do it over and again, pushing through the frustrations and disappointments to connect with other children, until it looked second nature these last few months.”

Thank you, Fordham family, for wanting to pay it forward for the next generation of AP students and their families who don’t know yet what AP is and/or how much joining the afterschool program will enhance their child’s journey at The Parish School. Your generosity is a perfect example of the Parish spirit!

For more information on how your family can support Parish’s mission, please contact us at advancement@parishschool.org.



The Margaret Noecker Nature Center Honoring Margaret's Contributions to Parish

A RETROSPECTIVE OF 10 YEARS OF THE MARGARET NOECKER NATURE CENTER.
BY NANCY NALENCE

A Surfeit of Sunflowers

The Margaret Noecker Nature Center cultivates a living relationship with nature.

When you approach the cedar pergola that opens up onto Little Acorn Park, Phase 1 of the Margaret Noecker Nature Center, at the center of our campus, you'll notice the patches of sunflowers growing around the entrance.

Among all the other wild and cultivated plants that populate our grounds, this choice is most intentional: They were Margaret Noecker's favorite flower – and rightly so. Sunflowers are brilliant and cheerful, attention grabbing and joyful. At the same time, they are sturdy, and a source of nourishment for all kinds of creatures, including we humans. All characteristics that Margaret embodied. The Margaret Noecker Nature Center, this unique, visionary, magical place, stands in her honor.

The Origins

Margaret Noecker was instrumental in The Parish School's genesis and the school's first employee. As a young teacher, she was at Robbin Parish's side in bringing to life their shared vision of nature as a setting with untapped potential for reaching and nurturing children with learning differences. They believed that children could learn most of what they need through their interactions with the natural environment.

Over her years as a teacher at TPS, and after being named Head of School in 2003, Margaret continued to create opportunities for what we call "digging in the dirt" – activities that encourage our kids to interact with their environment at the most basic level. After the school's move to the Hammerly campus, there was space to expand nature-based learning experiences. With typical creativity, and with new terrain to roam, Margaret began a ritual of Sunrise Nature Walks for (teachers, parents, and students), just to see the day begin and to witness the miracle of their surroundings coming alive.

In 2013 Margaret died tragically and unexpectedly. Her loss was a tremendous blow, not just to her family, but to the educational and TPS communities, and especially to the children whose love and accomplishments she cherished. Now, there was a question of how to commemorate the contributions she made to education and to celebrate the passion she poured into the school.



The First Steps

Donations in Margaret's memory began to flow in, which became the foundation for a master plan for a full-blown nature learning center to be built in phases. Nicholas Noecker, Jr., Margaret's husband, conceived the project as a center of excellence that would, in his words, "attract funding and deliver valuable nature learning experiences for young children."

Terri Garth, Director of Integrated Arts and Sciences, was selected to lead the Center's multi-year development. For Terri, this was a project close to her heart. "Ultimately the MNNC is about connecting children and nature to nourish relationships, just like Margaret did. They will never stop teaching us," she said.

The Three Phases

NLI from North Carolina State University developed the initial conceptual plan for the campus. Then, TBG Partners, the Houston-based landscape architect, planning, and design firm, was selected to develop a schematic design of the MNNC that would fulfill its mission statement.

PHASE 1, targeted to open in 2018 would be Little Acorn Park, which has transformed the preschool playground into a certified outdoor classroom.

IN PHASE 2, our preprimary and Carruth playground would be remodeled into Oak Creek Exploration Zone. It was officially opened in November 2022, with our outdoor certification in progress.

PHASE 3 will see the untamed center park area transformed into an outdoor Hub. Fenced and gated walking trails and plant identifiers along Brittmoore are also included in Phase 3. This project will be rolled into a future capital campaign for TPS.

“

Margaret's energy has been the driving force in creating this groundbreaking learning environment. I can't think of a better way to honor her in the light of love and the passion we share for our children.”

Where We Are Today

Phase 3 is in its early stages. We are currently working with TBG Partners on drawings and cost estimates.

The MNNC has recently been accepted into an educational training partnership, UT's Sprouting Teachers program which will allow us to expand our science, literacy, and social studies curriculums using our existing gardens.

And, in honor of our former Parish student Ryan Begnaud we are in the process of reconstructing and enhancing our community garden to be named The Ryan Begnaud Thankful Garden.

The Legacy

With the MNNC, The Parish School as well as the Center have become recognized as a pioneer in the use of nature-based learning for children with learning differences, built on the conviction that, by cultivating relationships with nature and its creatures, they can learn how to care for themselves and others.

Recognizing the inspiration for this innovative enterprise, Terri said, "Margaret's energy has been the driving force in creating this groundbreaking learning environment. I can't think of a better way to honor her in the light of love and the passion we share for our children."

The Margaret Noecker Nature Center has so much to be grateful for – our teachers, who, from its conception, embraced the project; our donors, who had the foresight to believe in our vision; all of our consultants and educators, who advised us and guided our path; our parents and families, whose loving support we can always depend on; our kids, who have leapt in and prospered with their typical enthusiasm; and the Noecker family, who saw beyond their stunning loss and imagined a legacy for their beloved wife and mother.

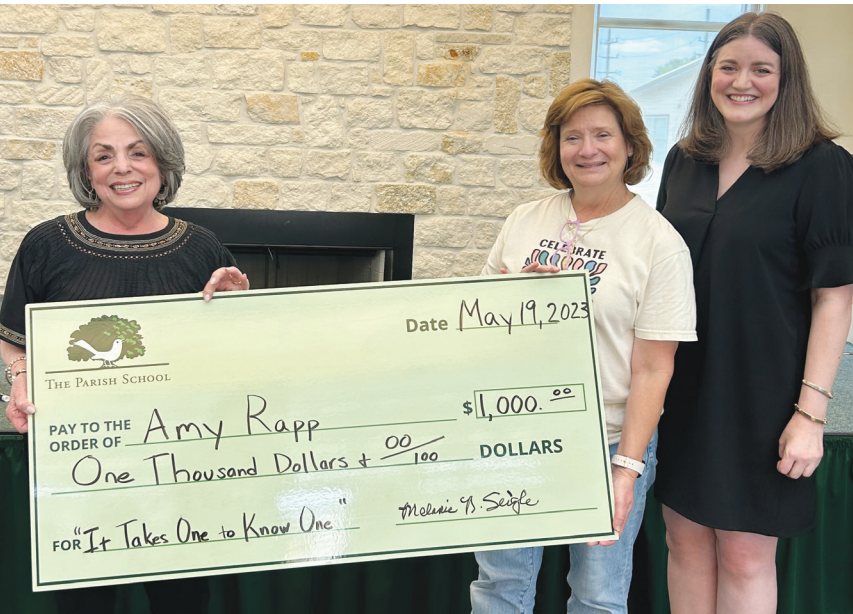
You have all cultivated our shared garden. But the seeds are Margaret's. The sunflowers that greet you at the entrance to Little Acorn Park shine in her honor.

Family Surprises Long-Time Parish School Board Member with Gift in Her Honor

The children of long-time Parish School board member Melanie Seigle wanted to do something special to celebrate their mother's recent 80th birthday. Melanie has spent her career as a speech language pathologist, even working at Parish for a period of time. Her children wanted to honor her legacy and passion for The Parish School, and hence an idea was born. Melanie's daughter Emily reached out to Holly Wilbourn, our Director of Advancement, and asked if it would be possible for Melanie's family and friends to fund an honorarium, now lovingly called "It Takes One to Know One," that will be given annually for excellence in speech language pathology to an individual who embraces the Parish Way and embodies Melanie's passion for advocacy for children and families.

On Friday, May 19th, the school hosted a surprise birthday party for Melanie. Several of her family members flew in for the occasion and were joined by the Seigle's friends, Parish School board members, and staff members. Melanie was indeed surprised and so very touched by the honor in her name. This year's recipient of "It Takes One to Know One" honor was Parish Early Childhood SLP Amy Rapp!

This year's recipient of
"It Takes One to Know One" honor
was Parish Early Childhood SLP
Amy Rapp!





THE PARISH SCHOOL'S 3RD ANNUAL BIKE-A-THON PROVIDES SOCKS AND SHOES FOR CHILDREN IN NEED

The Parish School elementary students organized the third annual Bike-A-Thon, which was held on Friday, March 31, 2023. Four charities were identified as possible beneficiaries, and students had the opportunity to learn about each organization's mission before voting for their favorite. After the votes were tallied, the students elected for Parish Bike-A-Thon donations to benefit Sole Loved, a local charity that delivers new and gently used tennis shoes to children. Students learned the importance of giving back to the community by bringing in shoes and socks, along with financial donations, that Sole Loved will use to provide shoes to children in need in the Houston area.

In the weeks leading up to the event, students ask their families and families' friends to donate items to support their efforts. Students brought in their donations each week as the excitement continued to grow! Also, many students were motivated to work hard to learn how to ride their bikes just for this event.

As they did for the two previous Bike-A-Thons, Officer R.A. Arriaga and Officer E. Netro from the Houston Police Department stopped by the school to talk to our students about bike safety, including the importance of wearing a helmet and how to pass other bikers safely.

On the day of the event, you could feel the excitement on campus as students cruised around the circle drive. The Houston Police Department officers, who had visited campus the week before, came back out to support our event and rode in the event themselves. They joined the students on the circle drive to make sure that the students rode safe.

The hard work of the students and event coordinator and Parish SLP Miri Tusing was apparent as \$2500 in donations and a vehicle-full of shoes and socks were delivered to Sole Loved. Parish students were rewarded for the efforts with cold treats provided by the school's Advancement Department.

"The Bike-a-Thon is a great learning event for our students. Not only does this event allow students to work on and use their social thinking and executive functioning skills when communicating with others about the purpose of the event, but it highlights the importance of giving back to their community," said Miri. "And in this case, the students were able to see the shoes and socks that they helped gather through their hard work and the generosity of their family and friends."

We are so proud of the work our students have done to help support the community and for the skills they exercised!



"Our new produce stand makes a great inviting display for our produce. The baskets help to organize the different vegetables and the wheels allow us to easily move the stand around campus,"

- Lisa Smith, Nature Studies Educator

EAGLE SCOUT PROJECT PROVIDES TEACHABLE MOMENTS ON CAMPUS

Bennett Pearson, a rising senior at Memorial High School, approached The Parish School about using his upcoming Eagle Scout project to create something tangible for our school. Bennett's older sister, Lainey, now a sophomore at Texas Tech University, attended Parish from 2007 to 2008, and the family had fond memories of the time they spent here. After consulting with Terri Garth, Chair of the Margaret Noecker Nature Center and the school's Integrated Arts and Sciences Director, about the school's wish list for potential projects, Bennett proposed to create two weather stations and a produce stand. The produce stand and weather stations have been on a long held wish list since the inception of the nature center.

Every morning at Parish, students are given different jobs. One such example is a weather monitor for the class where a student checks on the weather and then reports back the information. This example of an active learning exercise helps our students to practice observation and communication skills with their peers. With the addition of two large weather stations, one now located in between Chestnut and Laurel Cottages and the other between Laurel and Post Cottages, our students will learn even more! The weather stations feature a temperature gauge, clock, wind sock to measure wind direction, rain gauge, hygrometer to measure humidity, barometer to measure atmospheric pressure, and a display of interchangeable laminated weather terms and facts, including what to expect for weather for the current month. The weather stations have been an incredible addition to the campus. Additionally, each

weather station has a month-by-month curriculum to guide the teachers and students.

Bennett also created a large, mobile produce stand for the students to use while selling vegetables that they have grown in the school garden. The produce stand enables the students to have an official "check out" area during their produce sales. The stand is designed to have vegetables on a cubby shelf behind the counter and whiteboards on the front so students can advertise their wares. With the vegetables behind the stand, students can interact more with their customers during a transaction, which ultimately builds their communication skills and confidence. The harvesting and cleaning of the vegetables provides another hands-on opportunity to expand their knowledge base and increase their math skills. The funds raised by these sales are donated to a different charity each harvest. The spring donations went to Books Between Kids alongside a book drive helping our students earn a Junior Master Gardening certificate.

These projects were completed this Spring and have made an immediate impact on our curriculum. In addition, Bennett fundraised more money for his projects than needed, so he and his family donated an additional \$2,000 to the school's SEEDS for Growth annual fund.

Thank you, Bennet! A job well done!



Last fall, discussions began about updating the campus sign for The Parish School and The Carruth Center. The welcome sign would aim to make it easier for new visitors and guests to easily identify the school and clinic as they made their way down Hammerly Boulevard toward our campus. Board member Joe Probst, chair of the Grounds and Maintenance committee, not only designed the structure that features 16 foot cedar posts, but also negotiated that the entire project would be donated at no cost to the school! Thank you to Chris Sonnier of DC American and Jason Ponce of Gallant Commercial for their donations of time and resources in the creation of the new campus sign. The DC America and Gallant Commercial teams joined us on campus in January where they received paper flowers and thank you cards made by our students, and learned more about our school's history and what makes Parish special.

And not to worry! We have re-purposed the original welcome sign to another prominent spot on campus.





The Parish School’s 30th Annual Gala Highlights Why “There’s No Place Like Parish”

The Parish School parents, supporters, and friends came together to celebrate our 30th annual gala, filling The Ballroom at Bayou Place, on Saturday, April 15, 2023.

This year, over 300 people attended the There’s No Place Like Parish gala, themed after the uniqueness of our school’s mission, empowering children who have communication delays and learning differences to thrive through whole-child education, innovative therapy and access to nature. The combination of underwriting sponsorships, pre-event donations, silent auction, raffle, live auction and “Paddles Up” donations, led to a very strong \$325,000 raised. The funds will directly support the school’s financial assistance fund and fund teacher wish lists, which include classroom enhancements and professional development opportunities.

Emceeding the event once again was Emmy-nominated journalist and former Houston evening news anchor Kaitlin Monte Fohlin, who brought a wonderful energy to the event and entertained the crowd in between parent testimonials and the live auction. Adding excitement to the evening, Dorothy, Glenda, the Wicked Witch, and a magician greeted attendees as they arrived, giving guests the feeling of having just stepped foot in the Land of Oz. Before ushering guests into the ballroom for the dinner and program, Dorothy performed a magnificent rendition of “Somewhere Over the Rainbow”.

The theme of the night, “There’s No Place Like Parish,” was inspired by the numerous stories from Parish families who have experienced the uniqueness of our school and mission. Finding another school like Parish — the campus, curriculum, faculty, onsite clinic — is difficult to do. And in multiple instances, this has led to families relocating to Houston for their children to attend. The theme blended perfectly with the Wizard of Oz and Dorothy’s famous line, “There’s No Place Like Home.”

This was highlighted in the passionate stories from the Gala co-chairs, Bevin and Dan Dubrowski and Amy and Mike Montgomery. Bevin and Dan passionately described their journey to Parish for their son Danny, who is in his second year at Parish. “Once we learned about Parish, it seemed like the entire Houston community kept pointing us in the same direction, saying ‘Parish will have the answer’.” said

“I’ll never forget this as long as I live, but I went to pick George up from Carruth. He came bounding out and I scooped him up and he held my shoulders in his little hands and looked me straight in the eyes and said, “MmmAmmmma!!” beaming with pride... and then I lost it. Tears poured.”



Dan. “When Danny started at Parish in October of 2021, he was largely unintelligible to anyone outside our immediate family. Even Bevin and I could only understand about 30 percent of what he was trying to communicate... Today, thanks to the love, care, and unending commitment of Parish and the Wizards who teach there, Danny is now understood by all. And boy, does he have a lot to say. He has friends, plays sports, reads and writes, delivers jokes, gives epic hugs, and has a deep and constant empathy for others.”

Co-chair Amy Montgomery spoke to the crowd about her journey from working at Parish to finding her way back to find help for her son George. “I could see in our pediatrician’s eyes that he was about to tell us something we did not want to hear. And that’s what happened. My mind was already racing, but I knew where to go. I knew who to call. I called upon my village. I felt like I was drowning, but I knew who to reach for. Parish,” said Amy.

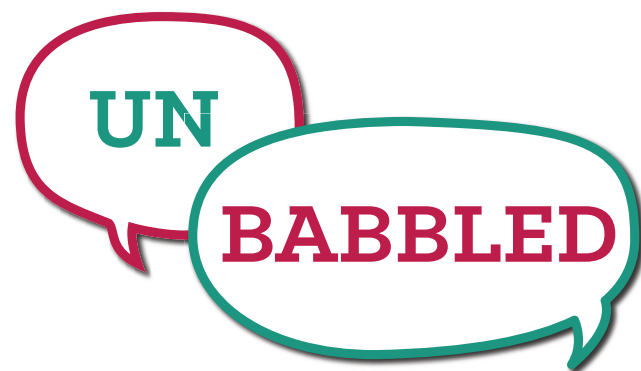
She described the evaluation and admission process at The Carruth Center and The Parish School, and how as parents, they witnessed small victories along the way that gave them faith along their journey. “George had just turned three and I was “BaBa” because the “M” sound was not one that he had in his inventory yet, but knowledge is power and having that diagnosis allowed us to adjust his intervention,” Amy told the crowd. “I’ll never forget this as long as I live, but I went to pick George up from Carruth. He came bounding out and I scooped him up and he held my shoulders in his little hands and looked me straight in the eyes and said, “MmmAmmmma!!” beaming with pride... and then I lost it. Tears poured.”

The emotional testimonials from the co-chairs preceded an unbelievable Paddles Up, where the attendees in the crowd donated over \$100,000 so that more children could experience the magic of Parish.

Underwriters include Bevin & Dan Dubrowski, Melissa & Steve Kean, Kirkland & Ellis LLP, The Roff and Freeman Families, and Mo and Ric Campo.

Thank you to all of our underwriters, donors, and guests for making this year’s gala very rewarding and memorable. For information on how you can support next year’s gala, please contact advancement@parishschool.org.





UNBABBLED PODCAST SEASON 5

Navigating the world of special education, communication delays and learning differences can be a challenge. Tune in twice a month to hear Stephanie Landis and Meredith Krimmel, two speech-language pathologists at The Parish School, interview guests from parents to industry professionals with the goal of providing guidance, insight and hope to those touched by children who are differently wired. Each episode will cover a different topic related to education or child development. Whether you're the parent or caregiver of a neurodiverse child who has autism, a speech-language delay or a learning disability, or you're an educator who works with special needs children, this podcast is for you.

Topics and guests include:

Play Based Speech-Language Therapy with Cari Ebert
Pediatric Nutrition Q&A with Jennifer Anderson from Kids Eat in Color
Supporting Sensory Regulation with Greg Santucci, MS, OTR
Exploring Inclusive Sports Programing with Wade Barrett
DIR® Floortime Model of Therapy with Sharon Duval, CCC-SLP
Speaking to Children About Their Diagnosis with Dr. Michelle Beard
What is Occupational Therapy? with Rachel Czar



Listen online at www.parishschool.org/podcasts or scan the QR code.

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THE PARISH SCHOOL'S 15TH ANNUAL LUNCHEON GIVING VOICE TO CHILDREN

Thursday, October 5, 2023 at 11:30 a.m.
The Junior League of Houston | 1811 Briar Oaks Ln

Featuring Sarah Ward, a dedicated clinician and passionate lecturer with a proven track record for translating complex ideas into practical strategies that work to improve executive function skills. Scan QR code for tickets.



GROUNDBREAKING APRAXIA RESEARCH



In the Spring of 2021 the Carruth Center was approached by SLPs and research scientists to take part in a scientific study examining the effectiveness of the Kaufman Speech to Language Protocol (K-SLP). The K-SLP is widely used by speech-language pathologists and highly regarded as being an effective and preferred intervention methodology for the treatment of Childhood Apraxia of Speech. SLPs at The Carruth Center have received ongoing mentorship and training from Nancy Kaufman for the last 12 years and are proficient in these methodologies.

Dr. Aravind Namasivayam from the University of Toronto and Dr. Vikas Grover from New York Medical School met with the Carruth Center's Clinic Director, Mimi Branham, and Nancy Kaufman, author of the K-SLP and owner of the Kaufman Children's Center, to begin laying the groundwork for this study. Once the research proposal completed the IRB process, the Carruth Center enrolled two of our current clients receiving individual speech-therapy services from our highly trained SLPs in the study. In the summer of 2022 we enrolled an additional 6 participants who were enrolled in The Carruth Center's Kaufman-Apraxia Bootcamp. Vigorous pre and post-intervention testing protocols were

completed with all participants to obtain baseline data and to measure progress. In addition a list of "probe words" was developed for each participant based on their specific speech errors. The participants repeated these "probe words" at regular intervals during the study to help measure the effects of their ongoing speech intervention. All of this data was shared with the research team who analyzed it based on protocols established when the study began.

We hope the information obtained during the study will increase the evidence base for the efficacy of the Kaufman Speech to Language Protocol for the treatment of Childhood Apraxia of Speech. The Carruth Center along with other members of the research team will present the findings from the Kaufman-Apraxia Boot Camp portion of the study at the Apraxia Kids National Conference in Plano, TX in July, 2023, and have submitted to present this data at the American Speech-Language Hearing Association convention in November, 2023. Thank you to the families who participated in the study — it makes such a difference in the field of speech-language pathology! Thanks also goes to the professionals at The Carruth Center who helped with data collection and to the research team who helped us keep the research on track.







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ANNIVERSARY

THE PARISH SCHOOL

Thank You

FOR THE IMPACT YOU MADE

We want to thank all of our alumni for the impact you made on the history of our school. Throughout the 2023-24 school year, we will be celebrating the 40th anniversary of the founding of our school and we want to make sure that all former students have an opportunity to celebrate with us.



To make sure we have your most up-to-date information, please scan the QR code and fill out the form.