

A photograph of a woman with short brown hair, wearing a blue t-shirt, leaning over a young boy in a green jacket. They are both looking intently at a green plant with small white flowers. Another child in a green jacket is visible in the background, also looking at the plant. The scene is outdoors, likely in a garden or greenhouse, with bright sunlight filtering through.

# THE PARISH POST

Summer 2025

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## Highlighting the Arts & Sciences at Parish

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FROM DUCKS  
TO DINOSAURS

Dawn Reinarz Retires After 30 Years

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SUMMER CAMPS, BIG &  
BRIGHT GALA AND MORE!

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Director of Special Projects/Assistant  
to the Head of School, Unbabbled Podcast Host

**Anne Brown, MS, CCC-SLP**  
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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](mailto: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!

Young Audiences of Houston  
March 27 · 📍 Houston, TX

What a special day! Thank you for having us out to your campus The Parish School and for supporting arts and culture programs for your students. 🌟🌟🌟

Young Audience of Houston

Ronald McDonald House Charities Greater Houston  
March 27 · 📍 Houston, TX

Thank you to The Parish School for dedicating its Bike-a-Thon to RMHC Greater Houston!

Ronald McDonald House Charities

caseycurryhou

caseycurryhou Thank you to my sweet friends at The Parish School for the lovely poinsettia! I have the honor of emceeing their luncheon each year - they are such a joy!

oliverinc097 Lovely 🥰🥰🥰

sandras.curry Amazingly beautiful and well deserved 🥰🥰🥰

caseycurryhou

childrenstherafun

childrenstherafun The CTF co-founders had the privilege of attending the Parish School gala. We love supporting our clients & schools and can't wait to play some fun new games this week!

#parishgala #supportingchildren #helpingfamilies #pediatric #pediatricoccupationaltherapy #Houston #Texas

childrenstherafun

mommypooppinshouston The Parish School empowers children who have communication delays and learning differences and understands the importance of early intervention.

Their Early Childhood program provides 15 hours a week of group language therapy and is designed to develop the communication, academic, social, and behavioral needed to succeed in school and life.

With small class sizes, a Speech Pathologist in each class, and music, art, and occupational therapy built into the curriculum, it's a one-stop shop to unlock your child's full potential.

To learn more visit: parishschool.org

#TheParishSchool #ParishSchoolTX #Houston #Houstonkids

mommypooppinshouston and parishschooltx

Jennifer Lynn Tucker

This is one of my favorite places on the planet! An amazing, nurturing setting for children who learn differently. The Margaret Kessler Bellamy Center is unique and is one of a kind outdoor learning environment. The Parish School and The Carolyn Center. I love this place so much! It has a special place in my heart and helps so many children and families in our community!

Jennifer Lynn Tucker

Silambam Houston

We had the joy of sharing our vibrant traditions of Indian classical dance with students at Episcopal High School and The Parish School through our Dance Across India program, in association with Young Audiences of Houston!

This interactive showcase is one of our favorite K-12 offerings, because it immerses students in the vibrant artistic traditions of the Indian subcontinent.

We were thrilled to have shared this experience with two very different but equally engaged audiences: 100 enthusiastic high schoolers at Episcopal, and 60 sweet elementary-age special needs students at The Parish!

Silambam Houston

the.noodist

the.noodist What an amazing night at @parishschooltx auction. Huge shout out to @parishschooltx for all your work and for inviting me to participate. \$42,000 raised for 2 noodle rights left me absolutely speechless, especially for such a great school very close to my heart. My mom worked in special education for her entire career so being able to support The Parish School which provides world class resources to kids with learning differences was incredibly moving. I also apologize to all my friends for how many years of joy I spent in the bathroom 😂😂😂 Thanks again to everyone, and to my winners, we are going to put on an absolute show for ya'll.

parishschooltx Thank YOU so much for contributing to a wonderful night!

empyra 🙌🙌🙌

theeasternphilosophy 🙌🙌🙌

the.noodist That's awesome!

the.noodist



@TheParishSchool



@Parishschooltx



@the-parish-school



# LETTER

From the Head of School  
Anne Powers

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DEAR PARISH SCHOOL COMMUNITY,

As I reflect on another remarkable year at The Parish School, I am in awe of how hard our students work and the growth in each and every one of them. Not only in their communication and academics, but in creativity, confidence and social-emotional development.

This spring especially showcased our students' growth who were busy learning through multisensory experiences designed to ignite and encourage creative exploration. Activities like a living wax museum, musicals, cultural celebrations, planting and harvesting edible gardens, and so much more, engage multiple senses to foster brain development and aid learning. These experiences help cultivate curiosity and wonder, allowing the students to take ownership over their own learning as they begin to ask questions for further inquiry and discovery. This process helps children learn how to think, not just what to think and develop a growing appreciation for the process of learning, not just the outcome.

The Arts & Sciences program highlights our belief in nurturing all aspects of development through hands-on experiences that encourage inquiry and experimentation. Through the arts and sciences, our students discover tools to explore their world, express themselves, and connect with others. The opportunities this program affords helps students take risks, embrace mistakes and appreciate diverse perspectives and cultures. These experiences complement strong academic instruction and help foster a sense of community and pride in our school.

We are grateful to our dedicated educators, supportive families, and the Board of Trustees who help make these experiences possible. Your ongoing commitment allows us to provide a well-rounded education where every child feels seen, valued and inspired to learn.

As we look forward to the 2025-2026 school year, we remain steadfast in our dedication to nurturing the whole child. Thank you for helping us build a school community where creativity is celebrated and every student has the opportunity to shine

BEST,

*Anne*

Head of School

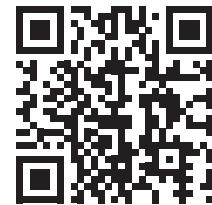


# UNBABBLED PODCAST SEASON 7

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 Kimmel, 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:

Understanding Twice Exceptional Students with Matt Fugate, PhD  
The Importance of Play and Narratives in Early Learning with Carol Westby, PhD, CCC-SLP, BCS-CL  
When Supporting Your Child Means Supporting Yourself with Courtney Suddath  
Eloping: What is it and How Can We Address it? With Natalie T. Montfort, PhD  
Tips for Speaking with Loved Ones About Your Child with Josie Gardner  
Concierge Medicine with Dr. Benjamin Ho, MD, FAAP  
Understanding Different Types of ADHD with Dr. Saporito, PhD



Listen online at [www.parishschool.org/podcasts](http://www.parishschool.org/podcasts) or scan the QR code.

You can also subscribe to Unbabbled for free on Spotify, Apple Podcasts, or any other podcast app. Please don't forget to give us a rating and review.

## SAVE THE DATES



**First Day of School**  
August 13, 2025

**Fall Luncheon**  
October 9, 2025

**Fall Family Garden Day**  
October 11, 2025

**Apraxia Walk**  
October 18, 2025

**Fall Festival**  
October 25, 2025

**Grandparents Day**  
November 21, 2025

**Gala**  
February 7, 2026

**Spring Family Garden Day**  
March 21, 2026

# *Alumni Spotlight* KYLE WAKEFIELD



In the fast-paced game of basketball, water and/or sweat on the court is a common occurrence. Whether it comes from a beverage or a player's sweat as they tumble on the court, it stops gameplay in order to be mopped up to prevent injury. Mopping up the floor during those instances was one of the University of Mississippi's (Ole Miss) Kyle Wakefield's job as the men's basketball student manager.

During a February 2024 game against rival Mississippi State, Kyle mopped up the moisture on the court with an unbridled enthusiasm that was infectious. The crowd lit up and cheered him on, and he fed on that energy and gestured towards the crowd to get even louder.

Kyle became a viral sensation. With the extra attention, he never felt that the moment was too big for him.

"It just motivated me to do my job a little bit better," Kyle said.

A determination to get better and grow was instilled at a young age. Kyle is on the Autism spectrum and didn't speak until he was 5 years old. Despite his early educational challenges and need for significant therapeutic intervention, his mother, Brandi, remained determined to get him into college.

Kyle enrolled at The Parish School in February of 2004, determined to get "a little bit better." His time at Parish ended up being the perfect fit for his needs.

"Parish has had a huge impact on my life, learning language and really being able to learn off other kids as well. It's just been a really big impact," Kyle said. "I definitely learned the power of language and really starting to really put everything together with the leadership of Ms. Rhonda and Ms. Camilla."

Kyle made exponential gains at Parish and attributes his teachers and the student-to-teacher ratio as being key factors. Parish not only provided a foundation for Kyle to continue his development, but also a safe space that allowed him to adjust to his overstimulations.

"He couldn't sit still. We didn't sit around the dinner table as a family because Kyle couldn't sit," Brandi said. "And again, Parish allowed him to



“Parish has had a huge impact on my life, learning language and really being able to learn off other kids as well. It's just been a really big impact,” Kyle said. “I definitely learned the power of language and really starting to really put everything together with the leadership of Ms. Rhonda and Ms. Camilla.”

stand or go jump for a while and then come back to the task. So, that model was great for what he needed at the time.”

The work wasn't just designated to the classroom either. Brandi assembled a team, which included Early Childhood Intervention, a speech-language pathologist, occupational and physical therapists and more to help in Kyle's development. He worked tirelessly, from sun up to sun down.

“From the time he woke up to the time he went to bed, there was no break,” Brandi said. “We were always working at some sort of task.”

Kyle transitioned out of Parish following the winter of 2008, and with the help of his team and family, eventually graduated from Taylor High School in 2020 with a 3.40 GPA. When navigating next steps, the Wakefields traveled to Mississippi and had lunch with family friend and former Ole Miss basketball coach Kermit Davis, who told Kyle that if he went there, he'd make him a manager.

Kyle got accepted to Ole Miss, became the student manager for men's basketball, had his own viral moment and graduated with a degree in journalism in May 2025.

“I knew Ole Miss would be open arms in accepting me, and I'm glad they did because it's really been the best five years of my life,” Kyle said.

Through years of hard work and sacrifice, Kyle is now a college graduate. Parish provided the foundation for Kyle to succeed. The Wakefields know that the journey may be difficult, but Brandi encourages other parents to always be on top of their child's needs in order for them to succeed.

“Like the Parish staff stayed on top of it, you now become the Parish staff as the parent, making sure that those needs are met and that you're getting the materials you need,” Brandi said.

The 24-year-old Ole Miss graduate has an interest in working on the media production side as he looks to begin his professional career. Kyle also wants to give back to the Autism community through fundraising and volunteering.

Parish played a pivotal role in Kyle's life. He advises students to just stay with the process and each day continue to get “a little bit better.”

“I think the biggest thing is if you give 110% in what you do, a good result is going to come out of it,” Kyle said. “I know it won't happen right away, but I know that if you put 110% into what you're doing, you're going to get a good positive result out of it.”

**Scan to see Kyle's viral moment!**



## 100 Days of School

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Primary and Lower Elementary students celebrated their 100th day of school by dressing up as 100-year-olds. The celebration was to commemorate their love of learning and growth.



## Honey Sales

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During the school year, Parish had our own beehive on campus! Towards the end of the year, Parish students accepted donations in exchange for jars of honey courtesy of our very own bees.



## Cultural Heritage Day

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Parish students had the opportunity to learn about different cultures that are found inside The Parish School family, taste their foods, listen to music and even had the opportunity to play an instrument.

## Earth Day

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Parish hosted an Earth Day parade, where students marched around campus, expressed their gratitude towards the planet and held a campus clean-up.



## Holiday Caroling

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Upper and Lower Elementary students spread some festive cheer during the holidays, going around campus and singing notable tunes ranging from “Jingle Bell Rock” to “Rockin’ Around the Christmas Tree.”



## Upper and Lower Elementary Basketball Game

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Parish students were swoopin’ and hoopin’ in a good, old fashioned game of basketball – with the blue team overcoming the red team in a tough contest.



## Commencement

Congratulations to the seven Parish students our community celebrated at Commencement! We are incredibly proud of each and every one of you! Your future is so bright!



## Field Day

As the school year came to an end, Upper and Lower Elementary students celebrated with some outdoor fun! They played games ranging from sack races, tug-o-war to scooter races – culminating with a snow cone treat!



## Music and Mayhem

Upper and Lower Elementary students took to the stage today to present "Music and Mayhem – The Musical," where they performed classic songs ranging from "Girls Just Wanna Have Fun" to "Bye Bye Bye" and "Footloose!"



## Wax Museum

The Cowboys stepped inside the shoes of famous figures as part of a wax museum! The students utilized their reading, writing, creative talents and more as part of this cross-curricular event.





## 2024-2025 Staff of the Year

Haley Garth, Jessica Buitrago, Daniela Jimenez and Chuck Harris



### **Haley Garth, MEd, LPC, RPT, NCC** CLINICIAN OF THE YEAR

"Haley Garth is the founder of the Play Therapy program at The Carruth Center and has been an invaluable resource to have on staff. Haley is able to consider the whole child and how their needs impact all the different relationships and areas of their daily life. She is quick to coordinate care with others on the child's team and comes to conversations willing to share her perspective and keep an open mind. Haley uses child led therapy techniques and is guided by empathy for the child and their family along with highly ethical therapeutic practices." – MIMI BRANHAM, Clinic Director



### **Jessica Buitrago** TEACHER OF THE YEAR

"Jessica's outstanding dedication to her students, their families and the Parish community is evident in the work she does and the impact she makes each day. Jessica's unwavering kindness and boundless energy creates a space where learning flourishes, while sparking curiosity and joy for her students. We are so grateful for the positive impact she makes in the classroom and beyond. We congratulate Jessica on this wonderful recognition and accomplishment!" – HAYLEY BOASMAN, Head of Elementary



### **Daniela Jimenez** PARAEDUCATOR OF THE YEAR

"Danny is a genuinely caring, creative, adaptable, reliable and dedicated professional and paraeducator. She is a team player who goes above and beyond in providing consistency in learning all students and their needs, while implementing strategies and building meaningful connections with everyone she works with. Danny demonstrates passion in her work and is always seeking ways in developing her skillset and serving our mission with integrity. I am so proud of Danny and all of her growth and accomplishments!" – HEATHER PASAOA, Elementary Coordinator



### **Chuck Harris** ADMIN OF THE YEAR

"It does not surprise me that Chuck was named "Admin of the Year" at The Parish School. Chuck came to The Parish School in February 2024, and he immediately blended into all of our core values, which are creativity, nurture, passion, ethical and people. He is extremely knowledgeable on all facets of technology and is willing to learn more. He is a good mentor and teacher to all staff, including the instructional team. We are glad he is a part of our Team and is definitely 'Parish to the Core.'" – TERRY CLOUGH, Director of Finance & Operations

# Celebrating THE 2024-2025 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 and 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. We announced our annual award winners in May, and they are:



**Janet Eckert**  
BOARD MEMBER OF THE YEAR



**Marie Clark**  
ABOVE AND BEYOND AWARD



**Mayuri Appareddy and Sapna Patel**  
VOLUNTEERS OF THE YEAR



# *A Space to Grow,* **A PLACE TO SHINE**

Over 34 years ago, beloved Parish School teacher Margaret Noecker asked one of her student's parents, Terri Garth, if she could help her put on a play with the class. Terri had a background in theatre, so it was a seamless fit. That play was a hit, sparking an idea that there might be more to this.

"I went to (Parish School Founder) Robbin Parish, and Robbin was just the kind of person who said yes to everything," Terri said. "Even though I wasn't a teacher, even though I didn't have any experience with special education, she could see that my vision could work. So, she hired me and let me start the drama program."

The stage was set, not only for future theatre productions, but as an essential part to Parish's curriculum – the Arts & Sciences department. The department has grown over the years, now including drama, physical education, digital instruction, the library, nature studies along with art and music therapy, led by Terri as its Director.

## **Finding their Voice**

At the heart of the department is a belief that the journey matters more than the destination. They focus on what children learn and experience as they create, not just what they produce. When you go to one of their classes, it's more important to the teachers that the kids to feel good about themselves; that they feel comfortable. It's a place where children can just be themselves.





“Art conveys a message when the words can’t”

- Krissy Christofakis



“I believe that the Arts & Sciences program at The Parish School is exactly what Robbin envisioned in terms of the arts at The Parish School,” Terri said. “It gives every child a place to be special. Every child has an ability.”

That concept rings true, especially for Terri, who continues to put together plays as the Drama Educator. Over her career, she’s witnessed non-verbal kids grow to shine on stage and take on the daunting task of performing a solo. She’s also seen shy kids go on to portray the hero in productions. She’s cultivated a safe space for her students to feel comfortable and have the confidence to grow into those roles.

“I want children to feel free to take risks,” Terri said. “I always want to make sure that I’m never being critical, but very supportive, very nurturing, so that eventually they feel safe enough to perform and speak in front of other people.”

The encouragement the department provides is critical. There is a place to excel for all of our students, and when they find it, they’re going to work hard to foster that love and grow it.

“As the village of Parish begins doing its work, and in particular in drama, they start to break out of the concrete black and white world,” Terri said. “They’re willing to pretend to be a fairy, or they’re willing to pretend to eat pretend food, or they’re willing to pretend to be a cat stuck in a tree.”

### A Safe Space to Create

Stepping out of the “black and white world” also means embracing creativity – which is especially encouraged in the colorful art room with Art Therapist Krissy Christofakis.

“When you’re in my classroom, not everything is so straightforward, and there are a million ways to interpret something, which is a metaphor for real life,” Krissy said. “You get to bend and play with the rules and kind of tailor it to your opinion and your likes and dislikes. You learn a lot about yourself in that process and you learn to share it too.”

Art class in a traditional school has students learn about artists, art history, different movements, along with the artwork during those time periods. Krissy’s art therapy class is different as the class is more focused on understanding one’s self – whether it’s through communication, regulating one’s body and understanding what’s going on in one’s mind. It’s about making choices, creating connections and gratitude of being able to create something tangible.

“Art conveys a message when the words can’t,” Krissy said.

For all of Krissy’s classes, she has a therapeutic goal that she focuses on each day, which ranges from expression and impulse control to regulation. She’ll also integrate different tools – such as putting small materials into pool noodles to better grasp it – so that her students have full control of their art and give them the feeling of being successful.

“One of my favorite experientials involves bilateral movement which naturally regulates the body. I typically do this activity with paint because I want them to experience the flowing nature and painting back and forth. They love it, and it can be so soothing for them,” Krissy said. “However, if a kid is struggling controlling the paint because they





need more control in that moment, whether they had a bad day or the paintbrush is hard to hold, then I'm going to adjust the materials and allow them to create the same type of movement with different materials in the body while in the art making process.

"It doesn't matter if you use watercolors or markers. What is important is how your body feels and reacts to actually using the materials."

When a student completes their artwork, she never gives her own interpretation, as "the meaning comes from the artist." She may give her class the directive of having them draw themselves slaying a dragon. She's doing this in an effort to understand how her students are handling anxiety, looking at the size differential between them compared to the dragon, are they wearing armor, are they winning, and so forth.

They may tell her they aren't feeling anxious, but their art could be saying something else.

"All those decisions that you make as an artist is there for a reason," Krissy said. "The meaning comes from the artist. Proportion is important, so is color and the type of line work. Whether it's straight and angular or if it's more circular, that gives me insight into their mood, whether it's more free flowing versus more angry and tension. I'm also watching their body language while creating, it always changes from start to finish."

Krissy previously worked with adults but started working with children when she got to Parish. She wanted to help children feel seen and heard, while giving them coping strategies when they face challenges. She prides herself on allowing the students to embrace their creativity in the safe environment she's cultivated.

"I want them to feel like it's a safe environment where they can make mistakes, they can explore, they can try new things without any judgment. No judgment from peers or from adults or from themselves," Krissy said. "I want them to be able to come and take it easier on themselves and be kind to themselves and know that they are loved and supported no matter what happened during the rest of their day or week."

### Linked by Rhythm

The loving and supportive nature that Krissy brings to art permeates throughout the entire Arts & Sciences department. It's the same feeling that resonates with students the moment they walk into Music Educator/Therapist Whitney Morelli's class as she greets them with a melodic and cheerful welcome each day.

"I always start class by saying, 'I'm so happy to see you,' and I really mean it. Some of these kids come from schools or have had school experiences where they didn't feel that way," Whitney said. "It's important to me that this is a space where they feel that they can be successful."

Music and sound are powerful tools. At the beginning of each school year, her classes look at soundwaves and record their own voices as a way to build confidence. People, inherently, don't like the sound of hearing their own voices, according to Whitney.

"If a kid can progress to being able to hear their own voice, to being able to play an instrument in a specific way, in a specific manner, at a specific time, being able to sing words that they didn't know last week is a huge confidence builder," Whitney said. "I think it's because something so personal like music is so innately embarrassing. It feels like you are putting your heart on your sleeve for others to judge. The ability to produce music and allow other people to hear it is a huge confidence builder."

All of the goals that Whitney writes in her treatment plans are non-musical. The lesson plan she builds takes months, if not years, to make. After each class, she evaluates what was successful and what wasn't and how she can improve it for the next class. Her lesson plans can range from focusing on consonant articulation or learning how one's voice can go up and down in pitch.

Whitney promotes teamwork to her students, as having 10 kids all playing an instrument or singing can be chaotic. By working together, they feel more connected. They can create harmony with each other, making something special.

"It allows them to connect with each other without talking so they can understand that they're moving their body at the same time to the same song without saying a word," Whitney said. "They're having the same experience with their ears, their eyes and with their bodies without talking to each other. And that is so powerful."

Whitney toyed with the idea of being a kindergarten teacher as a child. The unique concept of combining music education and therapy as a teacher "was a perfect way for me to work," she said. There's no feeling better for Whitney than seeing her students gain confidence and progress through music.

"My reward is if they feel rewarded. If I can see it in their faces, that's so cool," Whitney said. "You can see at the end of a song in here too, when we hit that final beat and stop, and they're like, 'Oh, we did it!' I'm fulfilled."

### A World Beyond Books

While students may take a liking to music and performing, some students prefer immersing themselves in a good book. Librarian Jill Wood cares deeply about fostering a love for reading. She wants every student that walks in to the Schissler Library to be inquisitive and look through the pages of these books and the endless possibilities reading can bring.

"I think that reading motivation has been such a passion of mine because I know that that's what carries them when they leave here," Jill said. "If they don't have a good relationship with books, they're not going to read even if they know how."

The collection of books in the library is vast. She also keeps up with trends, purchasing graphic novels, books in traditional schools or even books from popular franchises like Pokémon, Minecraft or Dog Man — the latter she dressed up as when promoting the book fair last year. She is intentional with the books she brings into the library, making sure there's books that pique the interest of all students at each level.

"If a child can enter a story and be outside of themselves and their immediate experience, it allows them to imagine what's possible," Jill said. "It allows them to also imagine what other people are experiencing. It's access to the entire world of human knowledge and experience through a book."

While the collection of books is essential for any library, Jill knows that being able to support different kinds of learning is just as critical. For auditory learners, Jill makes sure there's a strong component for oral reading, along with tactile learning opportunities for sensory learners. She also wants students to be technologically savvy, ensuring they have all the tools needed to succeed.

The library serves as a safe space that welcomes all learners. There will always be something for every curious student. Jill isn't the "shushing-type" librarian, she encourages all students when they get to the library to be lively, curious and active.

"We are here to support them. And that if they need a quiet spot for that, we find a quiet spot," Jill said. "I think that they know that their mode of exploration in our library is always going to be supported."

### Working and Winning Together

Being lively and active may be uncommon in libraries aside from Parish, but it's absolutely encouraged in Parish's Physical Education classes led by Jennifer Beleiff. Not all students come in wanting to be active, oftentimes choosing to be on the sidelines, but Jennifer works to provide an inclusive, welcoming environment where all students can play, regardless of skill level.

"Creating a space where every student feels like they belong means building an environment where each individual feels seen, respected and valued for who they are," Jennifer said. "This means adapting activities so everyone can participate, encouraging peer support and teamwork so students build positive relationships and feel safe trying new things and celebrating individual progress, not just high performance, so every student feels proud of their efforts."





“If they grow it, they will taste it. For them to sit down and try a bell pepper, even though it's dipped in ranch dressing, they eat it. I think it encourages them to try new things, not just food, but ‘Hey, I tried that, and I liked it. Maybe I can try this activity. Maybe I can hit a baseball.’”

- Lisa Smith

Through PE, Parish students can express themselves in ways that go beyond traditional academics. Jennifer promotes movement through self-expression, and activity with each student encourages collaboration while building confidence.

“Physical activity helps students see what they’re capable of, promotes body awareness, reduces stress and anxiety and also reflects on their growth,” Jennifer said. “It develops confidence that carries over into all areas of life.”

Parish’s Sports Court is one of the most popular areas on campus. It’s a wide open canvas of sorts, where students can choose to shoot hoops together, scoot around or a place to just run around with their classmates and laugh. It’s also where a lot of team activities take place. Jennifer stresses the importance of teamwork. Working together towards a common goal goes beyond playing a game, it helps build inclusion and connection by creating shared experiences. Uplifting one’s teammates, picking them up after a game is just as important. Similar to students taking the stage in drama, there’s no more rewarding feeling for Jennifer than seeing her students come off the sidelines, be a team player and give it their all.

“You can see their posture change. They walk taller, make eye contact and smile more,” Jennifer said. “That’s confidence built not just from skill development, but from feeling included and supported. These

transformations often happen gradually, but when they do, they’re powerful. The student not only becomes more engaged in PE, but they also carry that self-assurance into the classroom, friendships and other parts of life.”

### The Wonders of Nature

The collaboration built in PE continues as students step outside to learn from the world around them. Nature plays a big role at The Parish School, as the campus was built to resemble the summer camps Robbin Parish attended when she was younger. Naturally, it’s an important part of Parish’s curriculum as well. Nature Studies Educator Lisa Smith loves the outdoors, and she feels that nature can teach her students valuable lessons.

“The things they learn in nature apply to life, like patience. You get to plant a seed, and you have to wait several weeks before it comes up,” Lisa said. “They’ve enjoyed seeing that bloom. There’s just so much that they learn in nature that they can apply to their life and it benefits their life as they’re coming along.”

Lisa’s classes plant their own vegetables, and the students get excited watching something they planted themselves slowly grow over time. Not only has it taught them patience, but so many other learning opportunities.



Nature plays a big role at The Parish School, as the campus was built to resemble the summer camps Robbin Parish attended when she was younger. Naturally, it’s an important part of Parish’s curriculum as well.



“What we're doing is we're trying to find a place where these children excel or something that they at least enjoy. We can provide that, and we can give the child a different way of seeing themselves and a different way.”

- Terri Garth

“If they grow it, they will taste it,” Lisa said. “For them to sit down and try a bell pepper, even though it's dipped in ranch dressing, they eat it. I think it encourages them to try new things, not just food, but ‘Hey, I tried that, and I liked it. Maybe I can try this activity. Maybe I can hit a baseball.’”

Nature is an engaging topic as students run over to Lisa the moment they find a crystal or snakeskin on The Parish School grounds. It's a satisfying feeling for her to see the students so engaged with the outdoors. During her time at Parish, the nature studies program continues to blossom, with the completion of Ryan's Thankful Garden in 2023 and the beehive installation in 2024.

At Parish, nature is more than a subject – it's a calming, welcoming space where they can feel safe, curious and free to be themselves. However, Lisa does pass down one responsibility to her students: Always protect nature.

“Every bug, you don't have to step on it, respect nature,” Lisa said. “I think they get that from gardening too. When the garden gives something back to them, they get more respect.”

### Pursuing Passions

Thirty-four years after Terri Garth proposed her vision for the Arts & Sciences department to Robbin, the program continues to provide a

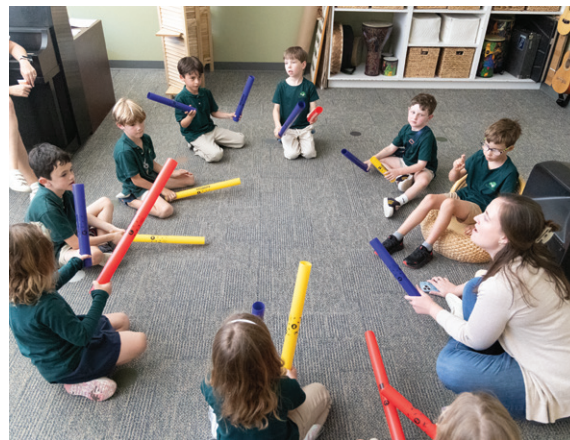
safe space for Parish students to express their creativity and thrive.

“Every human being is put on this earth to create in some way, and we're helping give children a venue to find their way to create,” Terri said.

Robbin Parish “believed that every child was special in some way,” according to Terri. The environment that this department has cultivated allows students to find an interest and gives them full confidence and support to pursue it.

It's the village of The Parish School fulfilling its mission.

“What we're doing is we're trying to find a place where these children excel or something that they at least enjoy,” Terri said. “We can provide that, and we can give the child a different way of seeing themselves and a different way.”



Every human being is put on this earth to create in some way, and we're helping give children a venue to find their way to create.



# From Ducks to Dinosaurs

## Dawn Reinarz Retires After 30 Years

When Dawn Reinarz first visited The Parish School in 1993, she was told, “Well, it looks bad on the outside, but the inside is really amazing.” What was inside wasn’t just amazing, it was truly special.

“When I started, I didn’t know I was going to be at The Parish School for 30 years,” Dawn said.

And over 30 years later, the beloved longtime Early Childhood teacher and speech-language pathologist retired following the 2024-2025 school year. It was a poetic end to a career for Dawn, who had a speech therapist when she was young and aspired to be a teacher at 10 years old.

Fortunately for her, those early experiences foreshadowed a lifelong calling.

### Early Years

As Dawn grew older and began attending Baylor University, she took an introduction to speech pathology class, prompting her mom to remind her that she had a speech therapist when she was young. It was a great fit, and her love for speech therapy grew. She took another class the following semester, which would eventually lead towards a BA in Communication Disorders and a MS in Speech Pathology and Audiology. A lot of her work at Baylor was working with children, so as she finished up graduate school, Dawn wanted to try working with adults as she took a job with a contract company.

“I absolutely hated it,” Dawn said.

Working in nursing homes, long-term care facilities was not a good fit. Dawn often felt as if she had to sell her services. As soon as she finished her Clinical Fellowship Year, she started looking at other



“I would do it all again to know that I impacted their life in that way.”

- Dawn Reinarz

opportunities. She remembered hearing about The Parish School while at Baylor, so she went out to visit the old campus on Timberline Road.

“I met Robbin Parish and I was like, ‘This is Santa,’” Dawn said. “This is what I really, really want to do. And then I interviewed with Robbin, and she hired me, and then I started that summer.”

In 1993, Dawn was officially an Early Childhood teacher for the Ducks class at The Parish School. Early on, the job was not easy. She felt overwhelmed, feeling as if she was thrown into the deep end. Thankfully, she had a safety net in Mitch Pengra, Parish’s former art teacher.

“I just latched onto him, and he kind of, as only Mitch could, showed me what he was going to do,” Dawn said. “My mind was blown, and it was a lot of fun working with him. So, I ended up enjoying the interaction and the relationships with the kids.”

After some time, Dawn got acclimated; she learned how to swim and thrived. But after three years of teaching, her husband Doug was asked to transfer to Ohio. Tears were shed, and, unfortunately, Dawn had to leave Parish.

“I really feel like that’s the right move for us,” Dawn said, “even though that’s not what I wanted to do.”

## Leaving Houston

When the Reinarz family moved to Ohio, Dawn went back to graduate school while continuing to work with early childhood-aged children as a speech-language pathologist. She would go to different schools and work with children.

But it wasn’t the same.

“I really missed being in the classroom the whole time,” Dawn said. “That’s where you really build those solid connections and where you can really make a difference.”

As fate would have it, after two years, Doug got another call to transfer. This time, they’d be moving closer to home to Dallas. Dawn began working at Plano Independent School District, where they had a co-teaching situation with both a teacher and speech-language pathologist. She, once again, enjoyed what she was doing.

After one year, fate would intervene once again, as Doug was offered a position in Houston. Dawn and Doug packed their bags almost instantly, and Dawn called Margaret Noecker to see if there were any openings at Parish. The timing was perfect, as there was an opening in preschool, which she took. After three years away, the Reinarz family was finally home.

As Dawn settled into her new classroom, she found out that the Reinarz family would soon be growing.

## Back at Parish

Dawn continued working until spring break that year, then went on maternity leave when she had her daughter, Rendon. When she came back the following school year, Dawn decided to pivot, instead working part-time as Parish’s speech pathology coordinator.

During this time, Parish was beginning to transition to its current location on Hammerly Boulevard, and with that came even more

change. The newly-renamed Carruth Center needed a director, so she assumed the role while also seeing clients, all while working part-time. She held the title for nearly two years but realized that the director role was one that required someone to work full-time. She continued seeing clients and started working Carruth's Language Development Class (LDC) and Emerging Language for a few years.

By the time Rendon was old enough to attend middle school, Dawn was ready to go back to teaching full-time.

"I wanted more," Dawn said. "I like to be challenged. I'd like to be continually challenged."

## Dawn's Dinosaurs

Dawn returned to Parish's Early Childhood program, this time as the teacher for the Dinosaurs, which is symbolic to her because "every year is different, and there was a lot that needed to change." The Dinosaurs became synonymous with Dawn. That classroom embraced each student, giving them a safe space to learn and grow.

It was noticed early on by Parish Head of School Anne Powers when she came in for an interview a decade ago.

"I just remember thinking how fun the classroom felt and how warm that it felt," Anne said. "I was completely impressed with the quality of therapy and how naturalistic it was, but also, and how child directed it was, and how intentional it was at the same time."

Throughout the course of her career, Dawn has had to learn and adapt, as education was always evolving. Ranging from social emotional

learning and thinking to executive functioning issues and conscious discipline, Dawn would integrate everything she continued to learn to help shape her classroom and develop her students.

"She connects with kids. She sees them for who they are, because she sees their value, their intrinsic value," Anne said. "It's just that level of trust and relationship, which is very much the core of The Parish Way, that gives her such a springboard into building skills. But I think it just starts with the relationship that she's able to build quickly."

The way she poured into and invested in her students was evident to Becca Alcala, who was Dawn's paraeducator this past year. Not every day was the same, and Dawn adapted and made an exciting learning experience.

"Dawn really teaches you the value of connections and relationships with each kid and how to nurture it," Becca said. "She creates this familiarity that makes you feel like you're working with someone who treats you with such kindness and patience just as she would with a kid and each student that walks in."

Dawn embraced her creativity, and all of her students would come to realize that they weren't just learning, but also, having fun. This was all intentional; Dawn wanted to make kids want to come to school.

"My whole goal is for them to have fun, to love coming to school, love learning something new or figuring something out," Dawn said. "So hopefully that's what they remember is that Dawn's class was fun."



## Closing the Chapter

Dawn was a fixture of not only the Early Childhood program, but The Parish School as a whole. The thought of retirement hadn't crossed her mind. She thought to herself, "I have more to offer. I have more to do. I have more things I want to implement and try."

It wasn't until about three years ago where retirement could be on the horizon. After last school year, following the retirement of fellow longtime Early Childhood teacher Amy Rapp, she knew at the end of this school year, it was time. She had given all that she could give.

It was a tough decision for her to make. Being at Parish helped her become a better mother and mentor. It's also allowed her to see the impact she's made on families.

"At the end of the year when I read those cards and I see those messages, what feeds my soul is parents saying, "You're an angel on earth. You've changed our lives forever. You have no idea the impact you've had on our family," Dawn said.

Dawn has been a mainstay at Parish for decades. Her impact is impossible to quantify, according to Anne.

"She has this legacy of over 30 years of teaching," Anne said. "When I meet people, they'll say, 'I was a Duck or I was a Dinosaur.' And they'll ask about Dawn and kids remember being with her. It'll just be sad not to have her here."

## Retired Life

Although she's officially retired, Dawn continues to stay busy. In June, she went to Mexico for a friend's birthday. The following month, the Reinarz family took a trip to Prague as her daughter landed a job there. She'll also be covering a Carruth staff member's maternity leave this November, so she's not leaving campus just yet.

But Dawn is taking retired life day by day. She wants to take a photography class, learn how to utilize AI and possibly get a dog, train it and bring it to Parish. If she's not busy, the best place you'll find her is by her pool.

Dawn poured decades of her life into children. It's helped keep her feeling young. Through all the ups and downs, it was all worth it.

"I would do it all again to know that I impacted their life in that way."





## Summer at Parish

# Fun in the Sun at Camp Acorn

The sun has set on another memorable summer at Camp Acorn.

Every June, campers make their way to The Parish School campus for a month full of outdoor fun and activities, along with continued language, academic and social development. Camp Acorn is comprised of a collection of summer programs – comprised of the Language Program and Sibling Day Camp.

While Parish students do comprise half of our near-200 campers, the other half are “community campers” or non-Parish students, which is what Camp Acorn Manager Maureen Giglio feels makes camp special.

“So many things make Camp Acorn special, but one of the most wonderful things we have the privilege of doing is providing interventions to the wider community,” Maureen said. “We are so excited each year to offer a boost of language for these children who can most benefit from our wonderful professionals, beautiful campus and overall nurturing environment.”



“Each year, we get to watch these children make outstanding gains in their progress within just a few short weeks. I firmly believe that would not be possible without first creating a warm and nurturing environment in which each camper feels valued and cherished.”

- Maureen Giglio

Maureen manages Camp Acorn every year, which includes handling all the logistics for the camp, navigating carpool and planning the adventures campers get to experience, among other duties. The most exciting part of camp that she organizes is “Fun Friday,” with every Friday this year featuring events ranging from a FOAMtastic party, a petting zoo, bounce houses and many more exhilarating activities.

What makes Camp Acorn truly unique is the wonderful staff and volunteers she puts together, who help nurture each camper and ensure that they truly get something tangible out of each day here.

“The staff and volunteers are the most important people on our campus during summer camp,” Maureen said. “They are creating a nurturing and fun environment, individualizing goals and supports for each camper daily, while ultimately helping our campers thrive.”

Camp Acorn strives to create an environment for campers to have fun, develop and foster lifelong friendships while continuing to grow and thrive. Maureen hopes that each camper is able to immerse themselves in this environment and feel the community and outpouring of love every day they’re at camp.

“Each year, we get to watch these children make outstanding gains in their progress within just a few short weeks,” Maureen said. “I firmly believe that would not be possible without first creating a warm and nurturing environment in which each camper feels valued and cherished.”

If you’d like to learn more about Camp Acorn, visit [parishschool.org/camp-acorn](http://parishschool.org/camp-acorn). Registration for Camp Acorn 2026 will open in January 2026.





## Where Summer Fun Meets Social Learning

For one week in July every summer, campers make their way up to Camp For All in Burton, Texas to Camp SOCIAL – a camp that blends fun with personal growth, giving kids a chance to unplug, make friends and explore the outdoors.

“Camp SOCIAL is a place where our kids can be themselves without fear of judgment or bullying,” said Carruth Center Clinic Director Mimi Branham. The Social Learning overnight summer camps began in 2010, after former Parish School Head of School Margaret Noecker and Social Learning Program Director Renee Attaway Storer discussed the need for an immersive experience for children struggling with social learning. That idea became both Camp Social Superheroes and Camp Connect. In 2020, The Carruth Center took over administrative duties for both camps from Parish. Carruth, working alongside Renee, merged the two camps into Camp SOCIAL in 2023.

Camp SOCIAL takes place at Camp For All, a 206-acre camp site that hosts a wide range of activities, from archery and horseback riding to challenge courses and talent shows. At the heart of camp is learning and practicing Social Thinking®, as social concepts are woven into, discussed and reinforced throughout the camp day. By encouraging campers to actively think through social situations, rather than depending on cues or external changes, Camp SOCIAL fosters true understanding and lasting confidence.

“All of our campers have some level of struggle with social competencies. Each day the campers participate in a Social Thinking® lesson and these concepts and lessons are reinforced throughout the day by camp counselors,” Mimi said. “From sun up to toes up, we are always looking for opportunities to teach our campers social concepts in a way that matters to them.”

Margaret and Renee’s dream of a camp focused only on social learning for students who needed more support came true and continues to benefit campers every summer. Camp SOCIAL allows children to not only have fun during the summer, but continue their development in a safe, nurturing environment.

“We want each camper to leave camp with a new sense of independence, confidence and belonging,” Mimi said. “We want them to go home exhausted and with great camp memories.”

If you’d like to learn more about Camp SOCIAL, visit [parishschool.org/camp-social](http://parishschool.org/camp-social). Registration for Camp SOCIAL 2026 will open in January 2026.





## THE PARISH SCHOOL'S 5TH ANNUAL BIKE-A-THON RIDING FOR A CAUSE



The Parish School hosted our fifth annual Bike-A-Thon on Friday, April 4, 2025. Elementary Paraeducator and Bike-A-Thon Coordinator Georgia Craig helped manage the logistics of the event. She presented the Elementary students with several charities they could choose to benefit with this year's proceeds.

"Giving the students the opportunity to vote helps them take ownership of the project and feel personally connected to the cause," Georgia said. "It encouraged civic engagement and taught them the value of their voice in a democratic process."

The students selected Ronald McDonald House Charities (RMHC) to be the beneficiary this year, which has a special connection to Parish staff. A week before the event, Georgia organized a lunch where Elementary Lead Speech-Language Pathologist Stephanie Landis and Head of School Anne Powers answered questions from Primary students, explaining to them the impact RMHC had on their own families along with the lives of families and children they serve around the world.

Georgia worked with Co-Captain Jonathan P. of the Cowboys class on a Super Mario theme, and the Mario Kart playlist revved the students up on the day of the event. Early Childhood kicked off the festivities riding their scooters and bikes around the Parish School campus as families and staff cheered. Elementary students followed and shared the same enthusiasm. The excitement around the event was contagious, as parents showed up in Super Mario costumes to cheer their children on and teaching staff grabbed their own scooters and bikes to join in on the fun as well.

The event raised over \$300 in cash and checks, along with a flood of donations including snacks, cleaning supplies and toiletries.



"The Bike-A-Thon was a huge success on multiple levels from the excitement during the event to the generosity of the families and community. It was clear that the students were fully invested," Georgia said. "Their involvement – whether through riding, cheering each other on or helping organize – created a strong sense of ownership and teamwork."






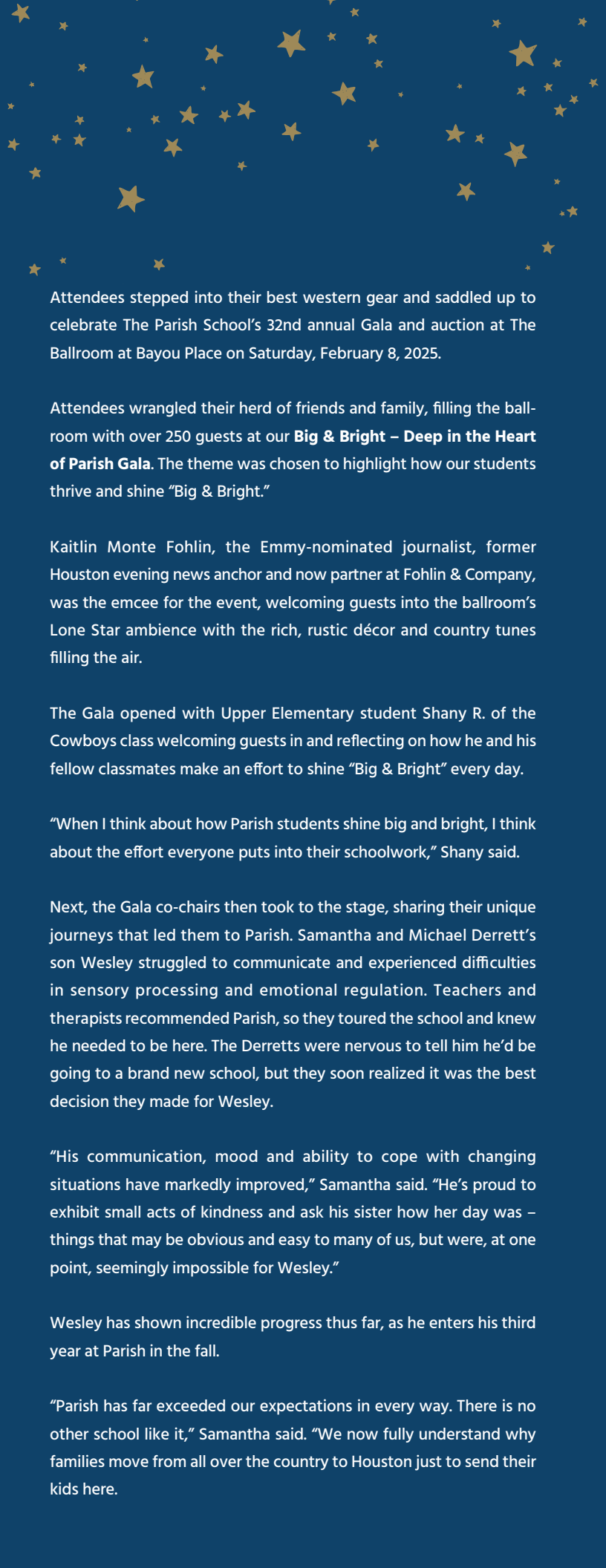
**BIG & BRIGHT**  
DEEP IN THE HEART OF  
Parish



THE PARISH SCHOOL'S  
32ND ANNUAL GALA



WHERE STUDENTS SHINED  
“BIG & BRIGHT”



Attendees stepped into their best western gear and saddled up to celebrate The Parish School's 32nd annual Gala and auction at The Ballroom at Bayou Place on Saturday, February 8, 2025.

Attendees wrangled their herd of friends and family, filling the ballroom with over 250 guests at our **Big & Bright – Deep in the Heart of Parish Gala**. The theme was chosen to highlight how our students thrive and shine “Big & Bright.”

Kaitlin Monte Fohlin, the Emmy-nominated journalist, former Houston evening news anchor and now partner at Fohlin & Company, was the emcee for the event, welcoming guests into the ballroom's Lone Star ambience with the rich, rustic décor and country tunes filling the air.

The Gala opened with Upper Elementary student Shany R. of the Cowboys class welcoming guests in and reflecting on how he and his fellow classmates make an effort to shine “Big & Bright” every day.

“When I think about how Parish students shine big and bright, I think about the effort everyone puts into their schoolwork,” Shany said.

Next, the Gala co-chairs then took to the stage, sharing their unique journeys that led them to Parish. Samantha and Michael Derrett's son Wesley struggled to communicate and experienced difficulties in sensory processing and emotional regulation. Teachers and therapists recommended Parish, so they toured the school and knew he needed to be here. The Derretts were nervous to tell him he'd be going to a brand new school, but they soon realized it was the best decision they made for Wesley.

“His communication, mood and ability to cope with changing situations have markedly improved,” Samantha said. “He's proud to exhibit small acts of kindness and ask his sister how her day was – things that may be obvious and easy to many of us, but were, at one point, seemingly impossible for Wesley.”

Wesley has shown incredible progress thus far, as he enters his third year at Parish in the fall.

“Parish has far exceeded our expectations in every way. There is no other school like it,” Samantha said. “We now fully understand why families move from all over the country to Houston just to send their kids here.”

“While it can feel like magic, it is a village of immensely talented, dedicated and loving people who are helping students overcome their unique challenges and thrive in the world.”

Haley and Thomas Roff shared a similar experience with their son Marshall, who was struggling in a traditional setting and was diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder and expressive language disorder. They felt unprepared and overwhelmed with the news of Marshall’s diagnosis, so they began touring schools to find one that would better suit his needs.

The moment they visited Parish, they “knew it was different.”

“The warmth and understanding of the staff, combined with their personalized approach and the collaborative therapy model of the on-site Carruth Center, assured us that Marshall would not just learn, but thrive and be celebrated for his unique strengths and supported in the way he learns best,” Thomas said.

Marshall will be entering his fourth year at Parish, and his growth has been evident.

“Marshall is excited about school and sharing what he is learning each day,” Thomas said. “His creativity, curiosity, confidence, particularly in his communication, have grown leaps and bounds, especially over the last year.”

The evening also included a live auction, raffle and the ever-popular “Paddles Up.” Those moments, combined with underwriting sponsorships, pre-event donations, and the silent auction led to a strong gross of \$453,000 raised – helping Parish sustain its mission to empower children with communication delays and learning differences.

Underwriters for the event included Kirkland & Ellis, LLP, the Roff and Freeman families, the Pontikes and Flannery families, the Dupuis and Rickertsen families, Annie and Taylor Mason and many more.

The Parish School is incredibly grateful to our underwriters, donors, the Gala committee and guests for helping make our event such a success. Next year’s gala is set for February 7, 2026, with more details to come. To learn more about next year’s gala and how you can get involved, contact [advancement@parishschool.org](mailto:advancement@parishschool.org).









THE PARISH SCHOOL

11001 Hammerly Blvd.  
Houston, Texas 77043



Don't just grow  
*Thrive!*

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*The Parish School's 17th Annual Luncheon*  
**GIVING VOICE TO CHILDREN**  
THURSDAY, OCTOBER 9, 2025

The Junior League of Houston | 1811 Briar Oaks Ln.

Featuring Jordan Boyce, M.Ed., LDT, CALT, who worked as a teacher at Parish from 2010 until 2015 before opening a private practice for reading therapy, and then returning to Parish as a Reading Specialist in 2023. She has worked with students of all abilities, providing expert intervention, academic language therapy, and parent support at both individual and group levels. Scan the QR code for tickets.

