

APRIL 2018

Important Dates/Info

MAY TUITION DUE NOW
Second-half fundraising
fee due April 13!

.....
Classes resume from spring
break April 3.

SPRING RAFFLE

Pittsburgh Pirates, DisneyWorld
and Food and Photo packages!
Ticket sales will be APRIL 9-13.
(See flier at end of newsletter.)

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'Slice of Summer' Mushroom
Summer Camp – Registration
opens to the public Apr. 9.
(See flier at end of newsletter.)

MFLC Board Meeting
Apr. 18

.....
MFLC Open House & Musical
May 3

Kids Marathon and Toddler Trot
of the Pittsburgh Marathon
May 5

.....
Ice Cream Social
May 15

*Mt. Lebanon Main Park, 6:00-
7:30pm (No rain date.)*

Last Day of School for the Year
May 22

.....
Enrichment Classes
and Lunch Bunch
Contact Miss Melissa at
melissa.oprison@gmail.com.

.....
Proper Shoes – Please be
sure your child has proper play
shoes (closed toe with a back),
especially on movement day.

.....
Ways to Help Mushroom!

- Youcaring.com/mushroom-family-learning-center
- **smile.amazon.com: Choose Mushroom as your charity.**
- *United Way: Agency #885339.*
- **Giant Eagle Apples for the Students program: School code #5245.**
- MFLC Scholarship Fund

From the Director ~ Joan Harrison

Each year in the newsletter I have included a monthly news corner. This year's theme is "Before I was a Mushroom Teacher, I was a Mushroom Mom." (Please be sure to read this month's corner!) Last year's theme revolved around a family and why they chose MFLC as their child's preschool. The theme of the 2011–2012 news corner was "When I Play I Learn."

As I am writing this article, on the first full day of spring, the snow is falling and school is closed! It was very unexpected and I hope welcomed by all of you. And I hope you had the opportunity to play inside as well as outside – there is nothing better than PLAY!

We strive at Mushroom to respect and value play of all kinds. While we are supportive of academic and skill-building activities in preschool, we recognize that play is what preschoolers do. In our culture of competitive academics, it is unfortunate that preschool is the final place where play is available. We stand firm in our understanding and practices that validate the value of play. We truly believe children can learn without "leaving childhood behind."

Sometimes it is difficult to recognize just how much our children are learning. They look like they are "just playing." Just playing, you say? Well, play is children's WORK. So what is play?

Play is symbolic and meaningful.
Play is rule-bound.
Play is voluntary.
Play is problem solving.
Play is intrinsically motivated.
Play is with new and old friends.
Play is exploring.
Play is developing curiosity.
Play is inquiry.

Play is active.
Play is making choices.
Play is joyful.
Play is counting.
Play is experimenting.
Play is reading.
Play is developing respect for yourself and others.
Play is confidence building.
Play is the natural way to learn.



The materials we choose to have in the classrooms and the teacher-directed activities we do there all have learning experiences hidden inside. All the very basic things we do are precursors to the larger learning we think of when we think of school... like reading, math and science.

The next time you see your child "playing" at school, understand that it is your child's WORK and he/she is learning many important things simultaneously at that moment! Thank you for sharing your children with us, and for giving us the opportunity to watch them play and learn.


- Joan



WELCOME FUTURE MUSHROOMERS!

Lucas Strinden, born March 6 – Congrats to parents Gabriella and Ernest and big brother Eric (4s-AM)!

Cade Beasley, born March 8 – Congrats to parents Heather and Cole and big brothers Pax and Beau (3s-AM)!


See the end of the newsletter for more details on programs and events, and also be sure to check out the bulletin board by the bench in the hallway for important school info and upcoming events!

Big THANKS to...

DeLuca family (Lydia, 4sAM) for their donation of puzzles.

Lipkin family (Charlotte, KToo; Henry, 2sM/W) for their donation of "Stepping Stones" for the classroom.

Gogal family (Lizzie, 3sPM) for their donation of "Big Boxes."

From the Board President ~

Kate Gigliotti-Gordon

Happy April! Spring break will come and go quickly, but the month of April will be filled with family fun from beginning to end. What's not to love about a month that begins with a day dedicated to fun pranks and jokes?! Colorfully frosted meatloaf-filled cupcakes, anyone?

Spring also means it's raffle time! We have three great packages set for our Spring Raffle this year, and prizes include front-row Pirates tickets, a photo shoot with Mushroom mom Michelle Sabourin of MWM Photography, and 1-Day Park Hopper Passes to Disney World! Raffle ticket sales start Monday, April 9, so mark your calendars! 100% of the ticket price goes toward your fundraising fee, too!

Is spring fever making you want to eat al fresco? I've got good news for you! Mushroom is planning a "TASTE OF LEBO" spirit day! You can stop at local Lebo eateries and pick up dinner or a treat. It's sure to be a fun time! Keep an eye on your Constant Contact school emails for more details.

Here's hoping that April showers don't just bring May flowers, but also colorful umbrellas and raincoats and plenty of puddles to have a great time splashing around in!

Twos Class *Amy, Sheila & Marlene*

One thing we all realize about parenting is that it truly requires a great deal of patience, because even the best-laid plans fall apart! Maybe you took your child to the expensive picture place and he ended up with a dog treat in his mouth in the pictures (Amy). Or you planned a big road trip to a family wedding and one of your four children came down with bad tummy trouble, requiring taking the potty chair along and making 162 stops on the way (Sheila). Or a routine trip to Toys R Us turns crazy when your child gets lost even though both parents are there (Marlene).

School is the same way. We have lesson plans available, but on any given day, they're only a guide to what we might accomplish. As you know, our motto is "individual growth in a shared environment," and sometimes the "individual" part takes precedence. A student might be having a hard time separating, so we spend more time playing together. We teachers might be all excited about a seasonal book and art

➡ *Before I was a Teacher,
I was a Mushroom Mom... MISS APRIL*

*"Every new beginning comes from
some other beginning's end."*

— Seneca

When I think back to the first day we set foot in Mushroom, I recall an immediate sense of community. Joan greeted us and gave us a tour of the building. My daughter and I were met with warm smiles and kind eyes. I knew instantly this was the right place for her. It was spring 2011 and our family was about to begin a new chapter in Pittsburgh, moving from Cleveland.

From the start, the staff welcomed us and helped us navigate through all the changes of moving to a new city. Hannah had a difficult start and at first had trouble separating, but Jane, Debbie and Brian encouraged her while assuring me she would be OK. (And, of course, she was!) She blossomed in Pre-K and continued to flourish the following year in K-Too with Marilyn. As our short time at Mushroom grew to a close, I found myself struggling with the thought of leaving this special place.

That's when I found myself at a new beginning. Knowing my background in elementary education, Joan asked if I would like to sub on occasion. I happily said yes and began subbing here and there in various classes. It gave me new perspective and I really saw how much these teachers care about each student. However it wasn't until I accepted a regular position in 2015 that I could truly appreciate the dedication of this amazing staff. I am so proud to be part of this group of educators. The support I have received throughout my own growth as a teacher here is unparalleled and I am blessed to call them my friends.

Just as I felt I had found my dream job, life decided it was time for yet another new beginning. This past year, the opportunity presented itself for us to move back to Cleveland and be closer to family. So, it is with a heavy heart that I tell you all I will be leaving Mushroom in mid-April. I cannot put into words what this school has come to mean to me and to my family. Mushroom will remain always in our hearts and we will treasure the friendships made here forever. Until we meet again.

project, but the children don't want to have anything to do with it because it doesn't involve trucks and other vehicles. Then there are things like vision screenings and picture day that are really important but do affect our schedule. We try to take all of these unexpected events in stride, because at the end of the day, the most important thing is that we provided your child with a safe, secure environment where s/he could socialize and learn in a way that's fun!

We also appreciate your flexibility with the various changes that can come up, like staying in when we thought we'd go out, or when your child has so much fun painting that we end up changing his or her clothes. A special shout-out goes to Amy's classes for rescheduling all the conferences that were to be held on the blizzard day!

What's best about the crazy things that come our way is that they make great stories for years to come. The fancy picture with the "Snausage" is still a favorite, and the road trip and the toy store stories are retold at family gatherings. Snow days can bring confusion about schedules and work but also surprise family time, and that's what we'll always remember.

Threes Class *Jamie, Debbie, April, Melanie & Kelsey*

My 19-year-old son announced the other morning he was invited to go to Italy this summer with a friend. As we discussed my concerns about him leaving the country without me, he said, "Don't worry Mom, I will be fine!" The idea that "Mom" and "Don't worry" could even be in the same sentence made me laugh out loud. Is it really possible for a mother or father not to worry about their children?

Sending a child off to preschool can be a scary thing...for the parents. They are trusting a stranger to provide the love, care and encouragement that has been their job for so long. The relationship that is developed between a parent and a preschool teacher is extremely important. I am very grateful for the parents in my classroom this year. They have supported our program, suggestions and ideas with kind word and thoughtful actions.

I was able to share the progress each child has made this year with the parents during conferences in March. There are four goals I establish for the students in my classroom. I think it is important for a child to transition into the classroom with ease. He/she should be able to follow directions and communicate effectively with teachers and peers. The children should also be able to play cooperatively with other children. If these four goals are established then the foundation for learning is created. The students are now able to learn, grow and flourish.

The students in my classroom have established a strong foundation and have been learning like crazy. In March we learned gray clouds cause thunderstorms, you can transform the letter h into a ladder, two squares make a rectangle and leprechauns are very tricky and hard to catch! We practiced our musical numbers and cheered on our friends during

April Enrichment Days

Enrichment classes are available for those 4 and older on Mondays and/or Fridays each month, 11:30am-2:00pm. Please pack your child a healthy, meat-free lunch. \$15 per class. **Email Miss Melissa at melissa.oprison@gmail.com to register!**

Days and Themes This Month...

MONDAYS with Miss Sheila

April 9 – Find out what's a "whirligig" and make your own! April 16 – Do oil and water mix? Explore to find out! April 23 – "The Runaway Bunny" by Margaret Wise Brown and paint a bunny pin! April 30 – Cinco de Mayo maracas and songs!

FRIDAYS with Miss Marilyn

April 13 – "Chickens Aren't the Only Ones" by Ruth Heller: Who lays eggs? Find out, and dye some too! April 20 – Read Emily Gravett's "Old Hat" and proudly wear your homemade hat! April 27 – "Frogs and Toads" by Lisa Herrington: Discover the differences between our hopping friends and do some jumping yourself!

talent shows. We cheered for the fine motor progress that each child had made in his/her writing and picture drawings. We encouraged more social interactions and reinforced positive communication. We sat back and observed the amazing community that has develop over the school year. The students truly care about the well-being of each other. Although we are still practicing appropriate ways to solve social conflicts, I know the students look forward to seeing each other during the school day.

In April we will be focusing on make-believe and fairy tales. We will adopt a pet and invite our families to a Pet Show. We will continue to become more independent, confident and secure little people. I can almost hear them saying to their parents as they leave our classroom, "Don't worry Mommy and Daddy, I got this." And they do!

Fours Class *Liz, Melissa, Jane & Lara*

Once upon a time, there were 33 little children who went to school at Mushroom. One day, their teacher said, "Follow me to the land of Fairy Tales." The children set off on their adventure. Together they met pigs, wolves, goats, trolls, bears, sharks, aliens, robots, and many other characters. They built houses and bridges, vanquished trolls, and tricked wolves. They laughed, they danced, they painted, and they acted. At the end of their journey, they discovered that they, too, had become storytellers. And, as they will be able to tell you now, they lived Happily Ever After.

We had so much fun exploring fairy tales this month. In addition to classics like "The Three Little Pigs," "The Three Billy Goats Gruff," and "Goldilocks and the Three Bears," we read as many different versions as we could. Some of our favorite variations of "The Three Little Pigs" story included *The Three Little Fish and the Big, Bad Shark*; *The True Story of the Three Little Pigs* (told from the perspective of the perfectly innocent wolf); *The Three Little Wolves and the Big, Bad Pig*; and *The Three Little Aliens and the Big, Bad Robot*. Sometimes the characters and setting changed, sometimes the point of view shifted, sometimes the problem was resolved differently, but the "bones" of the story stayed the same. We switched up the other stories, too, with *The Three Billy Goats Fluff*, *Somebody and the Three Blairs*, and *Goldilocks and the Three Dinosaurs*.

We also tried to find as many ways to tell a story as we could. We read books, acted out the story, listened to recorded stories, told stories with the felt board, put on puppet shows, and used block figurines. We even discovered that music can tell a story. It was a thrill to see the children's reactions as listened to the full 25-minute recording of *Peter and the Wolf*. I admit, I wasn't at all sure how that would play out. They were truly captivated, as were we as we saw them swept up by the drama of the music. I think our favorite type of storytelling, though, was the original, with nothing but our voices and body language to spin the tale.

Finally, the children wrote, illustrated, and illuminated their own fairy tales. They came up with some very creative tales! We loved seeing how they combined elements of all the different stories we listened to with their own ideas to create something original. The pride on their faces was priceless when we read their stories to the class and celebrated them as authors and illustrators.

In April, our theme will be "Our Town." We will learn about the important ways people contribute to the function and well-being of the community.



Register NOW for "Slice of Summer" Mushroom Summer Camp June 4 - June 29

Four-week summer program for ages 3 to 6!

Arts and crafts, games, science, nature, music, movement and, of course, playing outside!

9:15 - 11:45 a.m. Monday through Friday, \$75 per week. Registration opens to the public Apr. 9. If you have any questions, ask Joan!

Fives Class *Cara & Melanie*

We are always really excited when we bring in a new activity, game, book, etc. that inspires the children to make it enthusiastically their own. This month we were exploring the idea of storytelling, and I found a game called **Tall Tales**.

During gathering I introduced the game to the children. Envision that there are 20 cards that have different environments depicted on them (such as a beach, school, camping) and a velvet draw string bag that has 50 different pieces such as a sun, baby, car, spaceship, etc. The children play this game together by each choosing five of the pieces from the bag and one environment card to begin their story. Then each child takes a turn uses one of the pieces to create a line of the story one at a time so that they are building a story together. (This can also be played individually.)

It was magical to see the all of the children enjoying this activity together and that they have come back to it again and again on their own to play. Storytelling has so many benefits for our children as stated in the article posted on Learning Lodge child care blog...

The Benefits of Storytelling for Young Children

It's common to give students stories to read or to allow them to watch stories on television or DVDs. Storytelling, which is one of the oldest, most powerful forms of teaching,

offers another great way for children to enjoy stories. In fact, it offers many excellent benefits for preschoolers and school-age children.

Benefit #1 – Improves Language Skills

When toddlers and other young children listen to storytellers, they have the chance to hear words presented in a unique way while also hearing speech inflections. School-age children have the chance to listen to new words, which can help them to expand their vocabulary. Telling stories to children presents literary devices in a memorable way. Children have the chance to hear plot building, conflict, climax, characterization, and more.

Benefit #2 – Boosts Memory

Since storytelling doesn't use the addition of illustrations or books, children need to remember character names and key plot points. This helps to exercise the memory skills of children. Teachers can build on this benefit by taking the time to ask questions about the story during and after the story, further engaging memory skills in preschoolers and older children.

Benefit #3 – Develops Creative Thinking and Imagination

Telling children stories without visual aids helps to develop creative thinking and imagination. Children have to tap into their imagination, providing their own images to the story. Creativity is an important skill.

Benefit #4 – Enhances Cultural Understanding

Storytelling also helps to enhance cultural understanding, since stories give children the chance to explore their own and other cultures. When hearing and creating stories, children learn to empathize with unfamiliar situations, places, and peoples. Stories also have the ability to learn more about different values, traditions, and life experiences through stories.

Telling children stories, and having children tell stories, also offers many other benefits, such as:

- Increasing enthusiasm for reading
- Enhancing community among children
- Improving listening skills
- Encourages writing, since school-age children will want to write their own stories
- Keeps children engaged in learning
- Encourages purposeful talking and discussion

We are looking forward to moving into our Ocean Investigation this coming month, and preparing for our Mushroom musical on Thursday evening, May 3!

K-Too Class *Cara & Christine*

Christine and I are so enjoying our time with your kindergartners! They are so enthusiastic and want to create their own learning experiences! As we watch them our continued hope for them is to be in an environment that engages and nurtures their whole being. These hopes make me think of Bev Bos lately, who is an early childhood hero. These words below are a tribute to her and I hope they resonate with you as well in testament to the magic of self-directed play.

Experience is not the best teacher; it is the only teacher.

Children must interact with real people and real things; they need to encounter problems and figure out how to solve them when something doesn't go as one would hope; curiosity and trial-and-error must be championed.

If it hasn't been in the hand and the body, then it can't be in the brain. Another endorsement of experiential and hands-on learning.

Children were not born wearing shoes. Remember how good mud felt between your toes? Can we even remember the joy that rippled through our bodies and brains when we squished mud between our fingers and toes? Provide sensory experiences every day for children.

Children have to do and use too much of everything in order to figure out the world. This is at the heart of understanding how important mess and repeated activities are in helping children make sense of their worlds.

All learning involves risk. The environment and adults must provide opportunities for risk-taking in the learning process; "mistakes" are expected components of the inquiry process and valued for the knowledge they provide. Risk is not to be confused with hazard. Bev noted that we need to consider the "illusion of risk." It is our responsibility as educators to figure out how to provide experiences that children perceive as containing elements of risk, but in reality are still safe in nature. We also need to explain to families why children need to take risks: through risk-taking experiences, children learn to match their skills to the demands of the task. This is a delicate balance because our society is risk-averse due to potential legal ramifications. However, the neurological feedback children gain from the trial and error of risk-taking enables them to develop the precursor skills in their brains that will enable them to manage risk assessment as adults.

Earliest isn't best. Fastest isn't best. "If what we want for our

Mark Your Calendar!

**Mushroom Open House & Musical
Thursday, May 3, 6:30pm!**

children is a lifetime of excellence—in experience, in ability, in knowledge—we must be

responsible enough to wait and thorough enough to look at all sides of their development" (Bev Bos). We need to pay attention to how we can help foster children's engagement in learning so that they become lifelong learners. Children's brains have not changed; only the expectation about what children should be doing. These unrealistic expectations that ignore well-known and researched child development principles are having a deleterious impact on children's social competence and their ability to become successful learners in academic settings. A holistic approach to the education of young children must be adopted and practiced, not just in preschool but up to third grade (at least).

Our flexibility and willingness to follow a child's lead will allow remarkable things to happen, if we let them. This is about trusting children and not being afraid to examine and explore; we should model how to go about finding answers to questions. The unknown should be celebrated as an opportunity for learning, not as a fearsome threat to our power as teachers.

Sharing books with children is an invitation for a conversation. Although we should strive to read high-quality literature with children, the focus is not just on the content contained within the pages. What is also important is the conversation adults have with the child/children about the story and illustrations before, during and after the reading. This is because authentic learning occurs when it is connected to meaningful experiences that are mediated with a caring adult. Books are a catalyst for sharing memories, values and beliefs, as well as bridges to prior learning that help to support children's burgeoning understanding of their day-to-day lives. In fact, Bev never thought it was important to finish a story. If a child wants to stay on the first page of a book, showing full engagement and asking a host of questions, then that is perfectly acceptable. It is the rich conversation that is important.

Ask: "Whose needs are being met?" When Bev was on her first visit to Chautauqua County, I remember her marveling at our colorful leaves, since Northern California does not have the variety of trees that exist here. She gathered up several bagsful from my yard, as well as at other stopping points in our travels, to take back to the children at Roseville.

During her next visit, she arrived excited to share a most fantastic experience that had occurred at her preschool. She had arranged for a dump truck to deposit a load of sand directly into the classroom. She joyfully described the delight the children had in playing indoors on the big pile of sand and how they gradually, over a two-month period, carried the

Mushroom Ice Cream Social

**Tuesday, May 15, 6:00-7:30pm
Mt. Lebanon Main Park
(No rain date.)**

sand outdoors in small buckets. In another scenario, teachers were removing sand from the classroom because it was wearing away at the carpet. The juxtaposition of these two opposite approaches to being with children astounded me and compelled me from that day forward to encourage teachers to always ask themselves one of the most important questions in decision making: Whose needs are being met?

“Our challenge is not to prepare children for school, but to prepare schools for children.” (Docia Zavitskovsky)

Bev had this quote written on one of the walls at the Roseville Community Preschool, helping to remind her (and all of us) about what is important when we take on the responsibility to be with children. These words prompt us to acknowledge that getting children “ready” is not an end goal that we should want to achieve.

Children possess a different temporal sensibility than adults. They do not regularly think about tomorrow, nor do they very

often contemplate yesterday. They live in the present moment; we need to join them there if we do not want to miss out on how they are thinking, investigating, and creating their world. A practice of mindfulness is required so that we can be with children now.

Christine and I are present with your children now and we are so enjoying every single moment of it.

Look for school pics to be in soon!!



Honoring Mother Nature...

Earth Day, April 22

Gaylord Nelson, who served as a United States senator and governor of Wisconsin, founded the first Earth Day, April 22, 1970, as a demonstration to raise awareness of environmental issues and pollution. He once said, “The ultimate test of man’s conscience may be his willingness to sacrifice something today for future generations whose words of thanks will not be heard.”

Arbor Day, April 27 (last Friday in April)

Julius Sterling Morton, a Nebraska newspaper editor who later served as acting governor of the state and the U.S. Secretary of Agriculture, proposed Arbor Day in 1872 for tree planting and for recognizing the importance of trees. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, one acre of forest absorbs six tons of carbon dioxide and puts out four tons of oxygen. This is enough to meet the annual needs of 18 people.



A Slice of Summer Day Camp 2018

Arts and Crafts, Games, Science, Nature, Music, Movement, Stories, Outdoor Fun and So Much More!

Camp will be conducted in (4) week-long sessions:
Starting June 4th and ending June 29th
Monday - Friday
9:15am - 11:45am
\$75 per week
 + Camp Registration Fee: \$15 per child or \$25 per family
 All payments are non-refundable

For children ages 3 - 6
 ***includes class for incoming 1st graders

For more information contact us at 412-531-1225

Mushroom Family Learning Center
1900 Cochran Road, Pittsburgh, PA 15220
www.mushroomfamily.org



Pittsburgh Pirates Ticket Package Raffle!

The Grand Slam Package - Drawing April 19, 2018:



(4) Pittsburgh Pirates **FRONT ROW, HOME PLATE** section Game Tickets (with 6:00pm dining reservations provided in the Lexus Club & Gold Lot parking pass)
FIREWORKS NIGHT
 Saturday, April 28, 2018 @ 7:05pm
 Pittsburgh Pirates vs. St. Louis Cardinals
 Section 19, Row A, Seats 1-4

\$25 Gift Certificate to Mad Mex 

Disney Delight Package - Drawing April 18, 2018:



(4) One-Day **PARK HOPPER TICKETS** to **WALT DISNEY WORLD** (\$676 value)

Basket of (3) Large 15" Plush Disney Character Dolls 

Food, Fun, and Photos Package - Drawing April 17, 2018:



MWM Photography Family Mini Session

Paw Patrol Plasma Car (Marshall) and \$10 Gift Certificate to Learning Express Toys of Mt. Lebanon 



\$50 Gift Certificate to Whole Foods Market

Tickets on sale the week of April 9th! **Ticket price: \$10.00 - 3 chances to win!**
*100% can be applied to your fundraising fee!
 Only 500 tickets will be sold at random on a first come, first served basis. You can resell tickets to family and friends!*

Winning number taken from the PA Pick 3 first drawn at 7:00pm on the dates listed above. If an unsold number is drawn, MFLC will pull a purchased ticket stub at random on the following day.

Special thanks to our donors: Wabtec/Better Family, MWM Photography/Michelle Sabourin, Cuminsky Family, Mad Mex Restaurants, Walt Disney World Resorts, Learning Express Toys of Mt. Lebanon, Whole Foods Market of the South Hills

To always be *in the know*, read the Mushroom Constant Contact emails that are sent out on Sundays.