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OCTOBER 2017



Important Dates & Info

NOVEMBER TUITION DUE OCT. 1

Please help Mushroom by paying on time or speaking with Joan if special arrangements may be needed. **Or, just use your bank's online bill-pay service and you're set for the year!**

Tea Collection Clothing Fundraising Sale – Oct. 9-16
See pg. 7!

MFLC Board Meeting – Oct. 18

Parent-Teacher Conferences – Nov. 8-10. Look for your class day and info from your teacher soon.

Chick-Fil-A Spirit Night: Nov. 13

Enrichment Classes and Lunch Bunch
See page 4. Contact Miss Melissa at melissa.oprison@gmail.com.

Our preschool directory will be out soon!

We are compiling contact info from the directory forms. Please check to be sure we have your current information, and keep in mind that the directory and class email lists are for school use, play dates, and birthday party invitations, not for solicitation. Thank you!

Ways to Help Mushroom!

- Youcaring.com/mushroom-family-learning-center
- smile.amazon.com
- United Way: Agency #885339.
- Giant Eagle Apples for the Students program: #5245.
- Tyson Chicken Project A+ labels
- MFLC Scholarship Fund

From the Director ~ Joan Harrison

Welcome to a new year! I am excited that the year has begun and we are off to such a great start. The first few weeks have gone extremely well. It is so wonderful to have everyone back in the building after the long summer.

It was also wonderful to see so many of you at the "Coffee and Conversation" held the first week. I hope you had a chance to get to know some of the parents from your child's class. Not only students but many parents form lasting friendships at Mushroom too.

The weather this year could not have been more perfect for our family picnic. A sincere thank-you to everyone who brought a dish to share. Everything was delicious! Our picnic is one of those events that truly brings out the "family" in MFLC.

We are happy to be celebrating the 44th year of our fantastic preschool. Our families are the "owners" of this unique school. I greatly appreciate your interest in and support of MFLC, whether in the classroom or as a part of various fundraisers that generate income to keep our school financially sound.

And to keep our curriculum sound, MFLC is licensed by the Pennsylvania Department of Education and the Pennsylvania Department of Human Services. The curriculum developed by our teachers reflects Pennsylvania's learning standards for early childhood. It follows our philosophy of a play-based curriculum, covering 11 categories: free play, gross motor skills, fine motor skills, expressive arts, mathematics, perceptual and cognitive skills, language arts, science, nutrition, health and safety, and social studies/intercultural activities.

Through activities under these areas, our teachers integrate developmental knowledge with the attitudes, skills and concepts children need to make progress socially and academically. All our lead teachers and a majority of our assistant teachers have a background in education and have been certified by the Pennsylvania Department of Education. I invite each of you to become involved and actively participate in your child's experience at Mushroom. Each of us has an opportunity to keep MFLC flourishing for the next generation of children.

This year we are featuring a new addition to the newsletter: "I was a Mushroom Mom Before I was a Mushroom Teacher." I hope this new addition will be something you enjoy reading these next months.

Do your kids need a cold-weather wardrobe refresh, or do you want to get a jump on holiday shopping? Then check out the amazing "School Days" online fundraising event featuring **Tea Collection**, a children's clothing and accessory brand that's a favorite of many parents! The clothes are extremely durable, stylish and comfortable. When you visit TeaSchoolDays.com, October 9-16, enter Promo Code SDF17MUSHROOM at checkout to get 15% off your purchase price + Free Shipping, and Mushroom will receive 15% of all sales!

Welcome Future Mushroomers!

Coen Patterson, born 9/13 – Congrats to parents Megan & Cole, brothers Knox (3s) and Nolan (2s)!
Luca Morosetti, born 8/28 – Congrats to parents Ashley and Carl, and brother Alec (2s)!
Rhys Bowman, born 5/25 – Congrats to parents Halley and Tyler, and brother Ryan (2s)!
Angelina Goda, born 4/19 – Congrats to parents Melissa and Stephen, and brother Marco (3s)!

Big THANKS to...

- > **Sarah Staffilino** who coordinated the first-week coffees and to the board members who assisted.
- > **Jen Meloy** and the board for coordinating and assisting with our fall family picnic. It was a wonderful evening.
- > **All who helped with our playground** this summer including Kate Gigliotti-Gordon and Rob Gordon, Erin Betler, Abby Parker, Lara Sponsler, Dana Spano, Jen Meloy, and Todd Vernon.
- > **Simon Jacobs** (4s AM) and family for their donation of toys.
- > **Patrick Fitzgerald** for coordinating our positively perfect popcorn fundraiser.
- > **To all our families who donated** through YouCaring and the Doscher scholarship fund.
- > **Lucy Ivey** (3s AM) and family for their donation of toys for the 2s room.
- > The **Geletko family** for their donation of a paper cutter and pens, step stool and 3-hole punch.
- >> A super-big thank-you to **our dedicated teachers** who worked so diligently over the summer to make our school so amazing for the start of the year.

➡ Before I was a Teacher,

I was a Mushroom Mom...

MISS JOAN

Before I was a mom I was an elementary school teacher for 12 years. I became a stay-at-home mom when my daughter Marikate was 13 months old and my daughter Elizabeth was born.

Our first Mushroom experience was when Marikate started in the three-year-old program in 1994. The following year Elizabeth started. This is when I became a substitute teacher at MFLC. As the years went on, I became a lunch/enrichment teacher, classroom assistant and lead teacher. I have held every position there is in our school. I was even Miss Jamie's assistant teacher in the Threes, Miss Jane's assistant in the transitional kindergarten, and Miss Marilyn's assistant in K-Too. All these wonderful experiences led me to becoming the director of this fabulous school 10 years ago.

I never dreamed 23 years ago, when I walked through the door as a Mushroom mom, I would eventually have the honor and privilege to work with so many children and families. It is wonderful to be living the dream!

Many thanks also to Patrick Fitzgerald, who organized this year's kickoff fundraiser with the Pittsburgh Popcorn Company popcorn! And thanks to some very generous Mushroom families, we will be holding two raffles again this year, with 100% of the proceeds going toward your fundraising fee. Our primary fundraisers this year: Pittsburgh Popcorn, Penguins Ticket Package Raffle, a To-Be-Determined product sale, and a Pirates Ticket Package Raffle. Details will be distributed as soon as they are confirmed.

I keep mentioning "Family." We have always considered ourselves a family. We have had parents who have become teachers. We have had teachers enroll their children. We have had a student who came back to be a teacher. We have had parents who were once students enroll their own children here. We truly are a family. MFLC is run by the families. It is governed by a board of directors, made up of parents and staff.

Everything we do relies on the participation of parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles and even nannies and babysitters. We can't do it without the families! If you haven't done so already, take a minute to fill out the Volunteer Signup Sheet you received in your packets at the "Meet the Teachers" night. We need assistance in many areas, with varying amounts of time commitments, including slots for homeroom parents and upcoming positions on the board. There truly is something for everyone. Whether it is interest in joining the board, or if you have even just an hour or two to contribute to this amazing little family we have here at Mushroom, feel free to contact me. I'd be happy to discuss any time you are willing to give.

VOLUNTEERING AT MUSHROOM

Getting Clearances

MFLC welcomes and values volunteer participation. State laws regarding child protection require all school volunteers having direct contact with children to obtain background clearances. Please visit our web site for details:

mushroomfamily.org/volunteer-info.html

I'm excited to see what this school year holds for everyone. Here's to our Mushroom Family... May we have a happy, healthy, and successful school year!



Twos Class *Amy, Sheila & Marlene*

Welcome to the 2017-18 school year! We are so excited to be working with you and your children. As we discussed at Meet the Teachers night, our three primary goals start with S — safety, separation, and socialization. We will talk more about age-appropriate socialization in future newsletter articles, and safety is on our minds every day.

Separation from parents and caregivers is different for every child and situation. One of the ways that we try to ease your child's transition to the 2s class is with the slow start. We recognize that some children have always had a parent or family member close by, while others have been to child care. Adding a little more time and activity to each class period really helps most children get used to our classroom and us.

For some children, separation is more difficult. They may need you around more, sitting in the "parent chair" for a short period of time. We work on changing this gradually, too, moving the chair back from its first spot and eventually out the door. We have your pictures hanging up on the wall to look at with your child.

Following a predictable routine is also important so that your child knows what to expect. We use a picture schedule to help reinforce this. Although they can't quantify the passage of time, they can remember that outside comes after snack, and after snack, their loved one comes back!

Our 2s class is intended to be your child's first school experience without you. It's important to realize that it may not be what's best for every single child. Your child may need more time with you, depending on his/her experiences, age, and temperament, and that's just fine! We love to see your children in the 3s, ready for separation and socialization!

Thank you for all of the wonderful snacks you have sent in. We are all using cups to drink our water at snack time, and it's going well. In October, we will begin to add art to our daily activities. You'll be thrilled to see what we create!

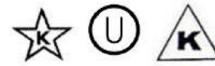
HALLOWEEN CELEBRATIONS



Halloween at preschool is generally mellow, and we ask your help to keep it that way. While costumes are allowed (over top of clothes), please leave masks at home to avoid frightening other children. And, as always, no weapons are allowed in the school. Please refer to your weekly teacher email for the particulars for your child's class. Thanks for your understanding.

Snack Tips

We appreciate the contribution our families make by providing snacks and we are all interested in providing healthy, nutritious ones. Please keep in mind when it is your snack day: foods must be in original packaging with ingredient list and expiration date, be kosher (look for any of the symbols below), and nut-free (plus any other restrictions your particular class may have). Fruits and vegetables are great & will be cut at school.



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

It's a new year in the Threes class at Mushroom Family Learning Center. There are inspirational words painted on the walls, telling a story about the expectations that await the 36 new students. The motivating words encourage us to be grateful, and choose kindness. They also remind us that love and laughter are important emotions that are meant to be shared with others.

Children are innately kind. They are role models in the sense that they accept all types of friends into their lives. Children from different countries, backgrounds and beliefs share a common thread in their wanting to play with other children. Through play, the children get a chance to practice important social and communication skills that will be strengthened and improved over a lifetime. Three-year-olds are fortunate to be able to practice these skills by sharing toys, taking turns, using kind words and showing empathy toward a child who is distressed or frustrated. It is not easy sharing the trains or waiting for a turn with a special item, but given the right words to use and a positive tone, working together can actually create friendships and produce imaginary play. As the social skills develop, problem solving can occur naturally.

In our classroom, the hope is to create an environment where children are kind to each other, are confident in who they are and are able to share those qualities with children around them. We are up for the challenge and can't wait to see what we learn from these amazing children.

Fours Class *Liz, Melissa, Jane & Lara*

During our first month of school we focused on getting to know each other, learning the class routines, and discovering how to use the classroom materials. Our goal is to create a

learning environment in which each child feels safe, loved, and empowered. To that end, we introduced three simple rules: be safe, be kind, and be helpful. These guiding principles create the loving boundaries inside which the children are free to explore and express themselves. Although a preschooler must learn many skills, all important classroom expectations fall under one of these three rules. It is respect for ourselves, each other, and our environment that guides our actions at school. As we teach the children specific actions, our guiding principles remind them why those actions are important.

Much of our focus was on establishing and reinforcing predictable routines. Children feel safe, comfortable and confident when they know what to expect. We begin each day by answering the Question of the Day. This ritual gives us a chance to connect with each other. The children have learned to find their name cards when they arrive and place them in the column representing their answer to the question. It is so much fun to have your say and compare answers with your friends that the children are unaware they are learning math (reasoning, counting, comparing, representing data, estimating) and reading (name recognition, left to right progression, one to one correspondence, using cues to decode text).

Next, the children are free to explore our learning centers. We have been amazed at how they have already begun to make use of every square inch of the classroom! Play time is a busy, joyous, intense, learning-filled time for our four-year-olds. This year, we modified our schedule slightly to allow for an extended period of uninterrupted play. We are already seeing positive results of this change. When given the time and opportunity to develop their ideas fully, children take their play and learning to a much deeper level. During this time, we also offer two or three teacher-facilitated activities that the children are free to choose, including a daily process-based art project. Planned pre-reading, pre-writing, math, and science activities are woven into the day as well. Often,

October 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 (Miss Amy the first two)

Oct. 9: Kindness ROCKS! We will be painting our own kindness rocks; **Oct. 16:** Scarecrows!; **Oct. 23:** Dino day! Come and create your own!; **Oct. 30:** "If You Give a Mouse a Cookie" story and making cookies!

FRIDAYS with Miss Marilyn

Oct. 13: Make a print from painted aluminum foil inspired by Vincent Van Gogh's *Starry Night*, and "Once Upon a Picture" story!; **Oct. 20:** Learn about owls and make a sponge painted owl! Story: "Little Owl's Night and Little Owl's Day." **Oct. 27:** Halloween Science – Make a ghost rocket and launch it!

IMPORTANT PARKING AND ARRIVAL NOTES

- There is a lot of traffic — please hold your children's hands in the lot to keep them safe.
- Please never leave a sleeping or sick child (or a healthy child!) in the car alone. If you need help, call the office, and someone can bring your preschooler in or out.
- If you arrive early, please wait in the hallway – until 8:55am for morning classes and 12:25pm for afternoon classes. The teachers are busy preparing until that time.

Thank you for your cooperation and understanding. Together we can make sure that every child has a rewarding and safe experience at Mushroom.

activities are carried over for multiple days. Because all activities are voluntary, this increases the likelihood that more children will participate in each activity. Children can also use the extra time to take a deeper dive into each activity if they choose.

When play time is finished, we all sing the clean-up song and help restore order to the classroom. This can be a big job! Then we come together on the rug for Gathering. We sing the Good Morning/Afternoon song then pass Hugging Heart around the circle, offering a greeting to each of our friends. When we have completed the circle, we remind the children that we are safe inside our Circle of Hugs. We are with our Mushroom Family. We want to set the tone that everyone belongs! It is safe to share within our group because we respect and value each other. We sing songs, read stories, play games, and have discussions.

Each day, the children are assigned partners. The partners rotate so that each child gets the opportunity to partner with every other child in the class. We remind them to take care of their partners and keep each other safe. We have been touched to see the sweet looks and greetings they give their partners as they walk together to snack. It takes a little time to get used to the idea that your line partner might not be your best friend each day, but they are learning the value of getting to know new friends. Sometimes, simply being paired with a partner sparks a real friendship! At the very least, it establishes an inclusive tone and teaches children that they can work successfully with a variety of people.

Our daily snack allows us to practice manners and conversational skills. After snack, the children line up with their partners and walk to the playground for outdoor play. We have been working on learning the playground safety rules, especially staying outside the red lines around the swings. At the end of the day, we sing to each child and take turns saying goodbye to Mushroom Mouse.

As we move into October, we will explore fall. We will have a field trip to Simmons Farm to pick apples on Wednesday, October 18. I hope you will all be able to join us. We will also have a Halloween Party on Tuesday, October 31.

Thank you for sharing your precious children with us. We look forward to a fantastic year of playing, growing, and learning together.

Fives Class *Cara & Melanie*

Miss Jamie was telling me about her Meet the Teacher evening and how she related that there are three words they are focusing on for the school year in their classroom. I really like this idea because it gives guidance to what your core values are, which then drive your decisions regarding the classroom throughout the year. So, I began to think...what would our three words be for the 5s classroom? These first few weeks of school have given me the opportunity to recognize what they are: CONNECTION... WONDER... JOY.

CONNECTION

My children began 4th and 6th grade this year and as usual it takes time each fall for them to adjust to their new class and teacher. During our conversations about concerns they were having, it came to me that each year they are craving to know that they have a **connection** with their teacher. It doesn't matter that they are 10 and 12 years of age; it will be a need that they have throughout their life to have a connection with those they interact with on a daily basis outside of our family.

It is so important that our children know and feel that school is where they belong and there is a place for them. So, when Melanie and I want to go rushing headfirst into all of the exciting content we want to share with the children, we have taken a breath, stepped back and taken the time to connect with the children. As stated in an article by NAEYC, "How to Connect with Children to Extend their Learning," there are three important steps in this process:

1. **Be Present** – You pause to tune in to how you are feeling, and consider how you might need to adjust to create a "just-right" fit with a child.
2. In step two, **Connect**, you let that child know that you see him/her; are interested in what he/she is doing, saying, and thinking; and want to spend time with him/her. Deepening your relationship this way helps the child feel safe, confident, and open to learning. Staying connected and observant helps you make good decisions in step three.
3. In step three, **Extend Learning**, you make use of your strong connection with the child to stretch his/her knowledge, skills, thinking, or language and vocabulary just a bit.

WONDER

We introduced our "Wonder Wall" to the children this month. The idea behind the Wonder Wall is to have a place where children can catch their wonders. We can jot down their questions, post them on the wall and maybe find the answers. The questions need not have an answer. The goal is not to answer every question but create a culture of wonder.

Gentle Reminders...

Tuition is due the first of each month. Please help us by paying on time or speaking with us if special arrangements may be needed. Or, use your bank's online bill-pay program... and it's done!

Please notify the office of any phone, address or email changes – also any changes in who has permission to pick up your child.

Please be sure your child's hands are washed at the start of the school day.

Children at this age have a wonderful sense of wonder and curiosity. Our job as educators is to create space in our classrooms and our day for this wonder. We need to let them know that their questions are not only valued as important, but have a place in our classrooms and school.

JOY

We hope to inspire a love of learning in your children so that they are lifelong learners. We do this by creating an environment rich in purposeful play experiences, which bring joy to the children. One of my favorite shirts that I own states on the front, "Play = Learning." I would like to add joy ☺. I found these kernels of goodness in the article "Joy in School" by Steven Wolk, which outlines the key tenets of what joy in the classroom looks like...

As educators, we have the responsibility to educate and inspire the whole child—mind, heart, and soul. By focusing on the following essentials, we can put more joy into students' experience of going to school and get more joy out of working inside one.

Joy #1: Children are given the opportunity to find the pleasure in learning. This kind of learning is often (but not always) motivated from within, and no outside forces or coercions are needed. Children don't mind the possible difficulties in this learning. Children often expect the challenges they encounter; they tend to see them as a natural part of the learning process, they are far more open to taking risks.

Joy #2: Give the children choice. Joy in learning usually requires some ownership on the part of the learner.

Joy #3: Let children create things. People like to make stuff. Having control of our work and using our minds and hands to create something original give us a tremendous sense of agency. There is a special pride in bringing an original idea to fruition. It empowers us and encourages us; it helps us appreciate the demanding process of creating something from nothing.

Joy #4: Show off the children's work. Our schools and classrooms should be brimming with wonderful, original student work.

Joy #5: Let the children have time to tinker. Children are allowed to dream. They come up with their own ideas and some of the best ideas come from tinkering.

Joy #6: Get outside. Interacting with nature brings a unique joy.

We are so thankful that you have entrusted us with your most precious children, and we are looking forward to a year filled with connection, wonder and joy!!!

K-Too Class *Marilyn & Marlene*

The beginning of the school year is a time for children to find their comfort zone. In K-Too the children have acclimated to kindergarten and are relieved by their new room's intimate, less formal and exploratory style. The children walk through the door relieved, looking forward to seeing friends and learning.

K-Too gives children a chance to explore subjects that can't be covered in kindergarten. This fall we'll make a "birthday cake" astronomical calendar, do apple science, learn about the systems of the human body, and make life-size self-

portraits. These enriching activities also develop the reading, writing, and math skills children are learning in kindergarten. I am fortunate to have such a creative and satisfying role in this exciting time in children's development.



Winter is an etching,
Spring a watercolor,
Summer an oil painting,
And autumn a mosaic of
them all.

-- Stanley Horowitz

tea



fundraise with school days

october 9–16

[Shop TeaSchoolDays.com](http://TeaSchoolDays.com)

at 15% off + Free Shipping & we get 15% of sales.

BE SURE TO ENTER promo code: **SDF17MUSHROOM** at checkout (Hooray!)



At Tea, we believe in connection. In curiosity. In conversation.
We believe that travel makes the world small enough to respect and celebrate.
That's why each season we pack our bags and go exploring—and then bring the
world home in easy, modern styles for little citizens of the world.