Mushroom Family Learning Center
An independent, secular, nonprofit preschool

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mushroomfamily.org

News & Notes

JANUARY 2014

A Big Thank-You to...

- Luca Stock and family for the donation of a helmet.
- Carrie Stock for all her hard work coordinating the Date Night in Pittsburgh raffle.
- Ms. Sheila for her donation of a refrigerator for the Pre-K classroom.
- Ms. Jamie for hosting the teacher holiday party.
- Amy Garces for hosting the board holiday party.
- All of our homeroom parents for coordinating the class holiday parties.

TUITION DUE JANUARY 1

CLASSES RESUME JAN. 6

NO CLASSES JANUARY 20
Martin Luther King Day

IN-HOUSE REGISTRATION FOR 2014-15 BEGINS JANUARY 23

CHANGE OF CONTACT INFO
Please let the office know if any of your contact information has changed (phone, address, email, etc.).

MFLC ENRICHMENT CLASSES AVAILABLE
For info, contact Ms. Jamie, jamie_geisler@comcast.net.

PLAY SHOES
Please make sure your child is wearing or brings proper play shoes to school, especially on movement day.

WAYS TO HELP MUSHROOM
- United Way agency # is 885339.
- Giant Eagle Apples for the Students program # is 5245.
- Save Labels for Education and Tyson frozen product labels (bin in the stairwell).
- Help other families by donating to the MFLC Scholarship Fund.

Welcome Future Mushroomers!!!

David Paul Telesco, born Dec. 9; congrats to big sister Annabel (3s class) and parents Jody & Rick.

Rowan Michael Fitzgerald, born Dec. 29; congrats to big brothers Callum (Early Learners) and Emmett (Pre-K), parents Jennifer & Patrick.

From the director...

Welcome to 2014! I hope you enjoyed your holidays and are ready to face the new year. We are looking forward to a great last half of the school year with your wonderful children and you.

As we begin January, please remember that this could be a whole new adjustment at school for your child. Just when you thought you had this separation thing licked! Separation is a normal, healthy growth and development stage that continues throughout our lives. Please understand that having difficulty separating shows the love and comfort children feel being with their parents and familiar surroundings. Isn't it wonderful our children feel most comfortable with their parents? That's what we want. Patience, understanding, tolerance, love, and time all produce the reward we are looking for...healthy, happy separations. (Remember, even our college-age children get homesick!)

It seems sort of strange to be thinking ahead to the 2014-2015 school year, but plans are already underway for registration. I am pleased to announce there will not be an increase in tuition and only a slight increase of $5 per student in the fundraising fee. **Preregistration for current Mushroom families will be held January 23- 31.** What does this mean? Everyone will receive registration information in their cubbies on Monday, January 13, but completed registration forms will NOT be accepted until January 23. In order to be registered, the following terms must apply:

- ◊ Forms must be filled out completely.
- ◊ Registration fee must be attached.
- ◊ Families must be current in tuition payments. The January 1, 2014, tuition payment (which covers February) and the first-half fundraising fee (which was due Dec. 1) must be in.

Registration will be open to the public on Monday, February 3. ***Please be aware that classes fill up quickly.*** If you have any questions, please contact me. Scholarships are available; confidential application forms are in my office.

If you know of a family who may be interested in our school, please have the parents call to schedule a tour. Thank you!

Joan

Joan Harrison

ATTENTION: Please note that the "big room" and piano are **not** available to us and refrain from playing there before and after classes.

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Dress for Success!

Now that the weather is cold, please be sure you send your children in appropriate outdoor clothing: warm coat, hat, mittens, snow pants, and boots when necessary. **Items should be labeled and placed in the child's bag.** The children go outside every day, weather permitting — no rain and a temperature of 28 degrees or higher. And don't forget **proper "play shoes"** (especially on movement day). Thank you!

From the president of the board...

When a soft blanket of snow covers my backyard on a gray January day, it looks like a different place. You can't see the brown crumpled-up leaves along my fence or the dead, shriveled-up flower in the pot on my patio. It is fresh, clean, and beautiful...almost magical. This month always has a way of making me feel the same way (minus the magical part!). It is a time for a fresh start, whether it's eating healthier, organizing the closets, or just playing more.

Even the preschool classrooms look a little different come January. All of the holiday artwork has gone home and teachers probably have a fresh stack of books to read to the children. The children are rested after a nice long break from school. Parents and teachers may or may not feel the same way!

Now is a good time to do what you have wanted to do since school started in September. Help out with a party at school, stop by a monthly MFLC Board of Directors meeting, or remember to put that tuition envelope in the mailbox before the first of the month. No matter what it is, January has a way of making it happen.

I hope this month also brings a big, fat snowman to my backyard and yours. Even he can teach us a thing or two in 2014. I came upon this cute saying recently...

Happy New Year from my family to yours!

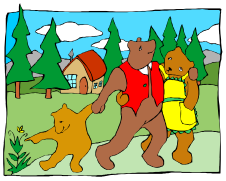
Susan

Susan Sarkis

News from the Early Learners classes from Theresa, Marlene, and Debbie...

Happy New Year and welcome back! What a wonderfully festive December we had. The room was filled with the colors and songs of the season. We enjoyed this wonderful season of family and giving, and worked hard on that special gift for Mom and Dad. And of course the season was not complete without a glittery reindeer parade.

Now that all the festivities are over, we will settle in and have a quiet January together. This month we will talk about what the animals do during the cold winter months. We'll make bird feeders, flap our wings to keep warm and practice hibernating in our caves just like the bears do. Bears will be a big topic this month. **We will have a bear parade, so everyone will need a SHOE BOX for their bears to ride in.** You may begin bringing them as soon as possible. If you have extras, we'll take those too.



What's a bear month without *Goldilocks and the Three Bears?* We will act out some of our favorite stories and refresh our memories with our favorite nursery rhymes too! Since winter brings snow, we'll create our own winter resort and play indoors with some homemade snow of our own. Having this quiet month will provide the opportunity for the children to practice more of their socialization skills. The concentration will be on providing the children with more opportunity to experience the social aspect of being at school. We will be having fun and keeping busy!

We want to thank all of you for your generous contributions of snack. The children are always delighted to know that there is something good to munch on and they look forward with pride to sharing it. We always make sure to give a big "thank you" to our snack person of the day. The children just beam as everyone recognizes them and their donation. Some suggestions for snack would be string cheese or any kind of cheese (the children love it), apples and bananas, graham crackers and, of course, Goldfish crackers. We know how hard it is to choose nutritious snacks while staying away from those foods that cause allergic reactions. We truly appreciate your thoughtfulness and generosity.

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Illness: When to Keep Your Child Home

While fever is a good indication of sickness, it is not the only one. If your child is "not himself," has vomited or had diarrhea within the last 24 hours, has a green nasal discharge, or is tired and irritable, something more than a cold is likely to blame. In addition to potentially infecting others, children are also less resistant to other germs when ill. If you have any doubts, it's best to have the child stay home. Of course, a big way to help prevent illness is to make sure children wash their hands upon entering the classroom every day.

Also, we would like to thank you for your patience in bringing all the outdoor gear to school. Some days the children guide us outside and some days they are comfy and cozy and just want to stay in. Either way, we like to be prepared. We will go out, if only for a little while, even if it snows. Sometimes it's just to make footprints and look for animal tracks.

If you have any ideas or activities that you would like to share with us and the class, please let us know. We always enjoy visitors and new ideas to expand on. We are having a wonderful time with all your children. They are amusing, enchanting, and downright fun!

News from the 3s class from Jamie, Debbie, and Tori...

Do you ever experience moments of pure joy? The type of joy that makes your heart overflow with gladness? These moments can be felt when you see your child participate in a specific activity or when you catch his/her eye and smile. Families and friends gather together during the holiday season to catch up on old times, share fond memories and just be together. Pure joy!

Debbie, Tori and I also experience joy when working with our wonderful three-year-olds class. Since we feel it is important to share this joy with others, we set a goal of achieving 10 "Random Acts of Kindness" during the month of December. **The students decorated cards for people in the hospital, collected 27 cans of food for the food bank and donated over 100 books for the library at Children's Hospital.** We also learned that we can share our kindness by saying "please" and "thank you," being nice to our friends and sharing our toys. We even made chocolate-chip cookies for the teachers. We feel it is never too early to learn that kindness makes the world a brighter place.

The class spent a week on *The Gingerbread Man.* This story continues to entertain the children. They experience different emotions throughout the story, from surprise to excitement and then to concern for the gingerbread man. We compared three different types of Gingerbread Man stories. We decided to change the ending of one of the stories because we felt it was too sad. Our wall became an ever-changing gingerbread house. The students worked hard to create a house decorated with candy, colors and gingerbread people. The students enjoyed taking ownership in making the decisions on how to create the best product.

Math was the specific skill we focused on in December. The students practiced identifying numbers and counting items. We learned how to add and subtract by using simple number problems. The students used Swedish Fish to sort by color. Our question of the day included patterns and word problems. We played a game where the students had to roll the dice, count the dots and then match the same amount of chips with reindeer pictures. We enjoyed learning new math concepts.

We also spent a week learning Hanukkah and Christmas traditions. We made menorahs and decorated Christmas trees, baked sugar cookies and used beads to make candy canes. The students worked hard on creating ornaments and handprint wreaths for their wonderful parents. It was a month for giving to our families, our friends and to complete strangers.

We hope you had a wonderful winter break. May you experience pure joy with your family and friends over and over again.

News from the 3/4s class from Liz and Sheila...

Happy New Year! We hope you had a wonderful time over the holiday break.

In December our theme was "Colors, Lights and Shapes of the Season." Although our families may celebrate different holidays and keep different traditions, our celebrations have common elements. Everywhere we turn this time of year, we are bombarded with a visual feast of color, light and shape.

We had tons of fun playing with flashlights and exploring concepts such as reflection, translucence and shadows. We enjoyed making shadow puppets and telling stories on our shadow stage. Painting on shiny aluminum foil provided a

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School delay/cancellation

MFLC will follow Mt. Lebanon School District decisions during inclement weather: When MTLSD is delayed, MFLC will be delayed; when MTLSD is canceled, MFLC will be canceled. Delayed start time will be 10 a.m. for morning classes which will dismiss at regular time; afternoon classes will begin on schedule. Please check local TV and cable stations, email blasts and the school answering machine when in doubt.

completely new sensory experience. We created animations by drawing on our new glow book, too.

Our classroom was invaded by mice in December, courtesy of Ellen Stoll Walsh. We loved reading her *Mouse Paint* and *Mouse Shapes* books, and playing with our little stuffed mice. We created colorful houses for them with the light blocks and constructed original pictures using paper shapes. We took the mice on color hunts and shape hunts, looking for examples in our classroom of different shapes and colors.

One of our favorite stories this month was *Pete the Cat and His Four Groovy Buttons.* We couldn't stop singing his little song as we decorated our own Pete shirts with colorful buttons in all different shapes.

This group is becoming more and more cohesive. One of the children's favorite activities, which they request again and again, involves "finding a partner" and moving together with your partner while we sing a little song. At the end of each verse, we shout, "Switch!" and everyone finds a new partner. While the children may have their favorite friends, they still enjoy trying to make sure they get a chance to partner with each of their classmates. We are very excited to see how much progress the children have made since the beginning of the year in their social skills! We have noticed that they are interacting in new combinations, too.

At this point, the children seem comfortable working or playing with any of their classmates. We are also finding that they really like to stay together as a group. Increasingly, activities we originally planned as small-group experiences become whole-group activities. You may find us happily painting all together, going to music class together, or working on a giant train track together. We just can't seem to get enough of each other!

The children enjoyed creating special gifts for their families in December. We are very grateful to Abigail's mom, Erika, for donating the clay, providing the tools and glazes, firing the pieces, and transporting them. The children loved the process, and the finished pieces are gorgeous. We hope you enjoyed them! We would also like to thank Kristie and Julie for creating a very special holiday party! And thanks to all of you for your gifts. We really appreciate your thoughtfulness and generosity.

In January our theme will be "Animals in Winter." We will explore the different ways animals in the wild cope with the elements during the cold winter months. If we are lucky, we may have some snow to play in, too!

News from the 4s class from Liz, Kim, and Amy...

Happy New Year to all of you! We hope you had a wonderful holiday season. We would also like to thank you for your generosity. Your gifts are truly appreciated!

In December our theme was "Colors, Lights and Shapes of the Season." As we move through the darkest part of the year, we especially appreciate the gift of light. Whatever holidays we celebrate, and however our traditions may differ, color and light are all around us this time of year. We began by contemplating the concept of light itself—where does it come from and how does it behave? We learned the basics of human history with light, from days when we had only the sun and moon to light our way, through our mastery of fire, and finally to the harnessing of electricity. We moved on to explore how light behaves.

By playing with flashlights we learned about concepts such as transparence, translucence and opacity; reflection and refraction; and color mixing. We discovered that light can pass through some objects but not through others. We took advantage of white glue's amazing ability to transform from opaque to translucent as it dries and created sun catchers using nothing but white glue, food coloring, and glass beads. We observed that shiny things, such as mirrors, reflect light back. We played "catch" with light and mirrors to get a more concrete idea of how light bounces. With the help of a white sheet, we also used our flashlights to create shadows large and small, and to tell spooky stories. By combining colored lenses and shining light through them, we observed another way that primary colors mix to create new colors.

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Does Your Child Want More Mushroom Time?

Sign up for enrichment!

In enrichment class, the children have fun making crafts, cooking, learning Spanish and reading new stories. Classes are available for those 4 and older on Mondays and/or Fridays each month; $14 per class.

Sign-up happens at the beginning of each month and you can choose however many to attend! Contact Ms. Jamie for more info at jamie_geisler@comcast.net.

Our letters this month were H and M (we took the last week of the month off to focus on holiday preparations). During H week we learned about Hanukkah, the Festival of Lights. We enjoyed playing with dreidels and sampling latkes. During M week, in addition to learning about mirrors, we read *Mouse Paint* and played with mice while learning about color mixing.

After reading *The Monster Who Lost His Mean* we met Muggles the Monster and practiced expressing our feelings and desires honestly but "without the mean." This can be a tricky concept! Some children need reassurance that it is OK to speak up and express their feelings, opinions, and preferences, while others need help refining their communication to focus on their own feelings instead of lashing out at others. The children enjoyed helping Muggles find appropriate ways to express himself assertively, rather than passively or aggressively.

As we learn about the letters, we continue to highlight the geometric properties and relationships of the letters. H and M are both symmetrical letters, or "mirror letters" as we call them in our class. We created them by folding paper along the line of symmetry and making a few cuts. It was exciting to see the letters emerge, and to notice the shapes left over afterward. We discovered that we could make infinitely smaller M's by cutting the same shape out of the underside of the folded M again and again.

We also added two new jobs to our daily rotation. The first is Question Reader. This child uses the pointer to "read" the question of the day and tally the results. Although most of the children are not yet reading words, they are ready to notice individual words and use 1:1 correspondence to make their way through a known sentence. The second job is Pattern Maker. This job evolved spontaneously within our daily Gathering. We usually clap a simple rhythm while singing our Good Morning song. The children started changing the pattern, which let me know that they were ready for more challenge! We have had some really complex patterns to follow! We had so much interest in creating rhythmic patterns that we could have spent the whole Gathering trying different combinations. Now that it is a daily job, the Pattern Maker gets to set the sequence for the day.

It was a lively month with plenty of activity and learning, but our favorite activity is still imaginative play. This month we noticed that the group's play is becoming more elaborate, role-based, social and sustained. We are so excited to witness this development! Role-based dramatic play is crucial for developing symbolic thought, social skills, and self-regulation.

The children created gifts for their families. We would like to thank Erika, mom to Abigail from the 3/4s class, for donating the clay, providing tools and glazes, and firing the pieces. We think they turned out beautifully, and hope you enjoy them.

We finished the month with a very fun holiday party, planned and executed by Joyce and Tatiana. Thank you for making it a special day for all of us!

In January our theme will be "Animals in Winter." We will learn how different animals cope with colder temperatures and limited food supplies.

News from the Pre-K classes from Cara, Jane, and Melanie...

As the days became shorter and the Northern Hemisphere saw more darkness than light, we used it as a base for our learning in December. We began our exploration by creating dreamcatchers while reading several stories from *Harold and the Purple Crayon.* Harold's stories are a wonderful way to explore how we use our imagination and our dreams.

We then expanded our exploration to the universe! We enjoyed being astronomers and learned about the planets, our universe and constellations. We created our own nighttime sky in the hallway by first painting our moon then adding stars. Flashlights were made available while we explored the concept of light and darkness. It began with making shadow puppets, and then naturally expanded to a camping scenario. This extension came from the children, providing a wonderful opportunity for building structures, telling stories and engaging in complex play scenarios!

We also enjoyed being gift givers this month. In our dramatic play area we had a wrapping station set up, so the children were able to choose and purchase gifts, then wrap them. As the activity was extended, it was wonderful to see the children

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Mushroom Wish List

If you or someone you know may be able to contribute, please let Joan know!

- Clothes: underwear, socks, pants, tops for both boys and girls
- Costumes your child may have outgrown — they are great for our dress-up collection
- Helmets for playground

creating cards and exchanging gifts with each other. We also spent time creating a special gift for our families. Our salt dough candleholders were bedazzled and personalized by each child.

This month we also did a home project that was then shared with the class. Each child created a booklet with their family that described what we would see, hear, touch, taste and smell in their house during a favorite holiday. It was so much fun to learn about all of the special traditions!

Even though the days were shorter and the air colder, there was plenty of warmth and love being shared in our class! As we move into the new year, we will enjoy creating our classroom Moon Phases journal and learning more about our classroom mascot, Snowy the Owl, along with some of his other nocturnal wintertime friends.

"Mushroom style." We have been so busy with holiday projects I think the kids miss the relaxed flow of a usual day.

We will be science oriented for the remainder of the month: winter, snow, the water cycle, and beginning our study of electricity (unless the kids show greater interest in another subject). Parents, if you have any special connections for field trips, science topics, community places, let me know. I want to start introducing possible areas of study to the children to gauge their interest level.

I hope you all had a wonderful and relaxing holiday and break. Thank you for the wonderful gifts. I truly appreciate your generosity! Thank you also for sharing your children with me. They are delightful and we enjoy our time together. Happy New Year!

News from the K-Too classes from Marilyn...

We filled the month of December with the study of our feelings and two world holidays: Hanukkah and Christmas. The children put together free-form natural wood menorahs, honed their cooperation and math skills playing dreidel, and learned the traditions of and story behind Hanukkah. For Christmas each child made a hand-painted ornament and a homemade card. Each child wrote what they would "give" for the holidays in their card. We discussed the tradition of giving for Hanukkah and Christmas and stressed how giving a gift was more rewarding than receiving one.

We decorated cookies, and sang Christmas carols, and had class parties to celebrate the season. The children learned that holidays are celebrated everywhere on the globe, although they originated in specific countries. Each celebration has a connection with light, caring, community, and specific traditions and symbols.

In January we will finish our study of world holidays with Kwanzaa (African-American holiday), Ramadan (Middle Eastern holiday), Diwali (India's holiday), and Chinese New Year. We will refocus on our journals, playing, exploring, and learning

There are many things you can do to help your child grow and learn...

Give your child opportunities to play.

Play is how children learn. It is the natural way for them to explore, to become creative, to learn to make up and tell stories and to develop social skills. Play also helps children learn to solve problems—for example, if a wagon tips over, a child must figure out how to get it upright again. When they stack up blocks, children learn about colors, numbers, geometry, shapes and balance. Playing with others helps children learn how to negotiate.

Support and guide your child as he/she learns a new activity.

Parents can help children learn how to do new things by "scaffolding," or guiding their efforts. For example, as you and your child put together a puzzle, you might point to a piece and say, "I think this is the piece we need for this space. Why don't you try it?" Then have the child pick up the piece and place it correctly. As he/she becomes more aware of how the pieces fit into the puzzle, you can gradually withdraw your support.

— From *Helping Your Preschool Child,* U.S. Department of Education

Business Directory

Reasonable Rates

Pre-K to 8th Grade
Reading & Math

(412) 221-4174

Private Tutoring
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Jane Birris
Experienced Teacher & Tutor

Your ad here!
$10/issue