

CALYX

PLEASANT RIDGE
WALDORF SCHOOL

Waldorf Education since 1980

Volume 33, Issue 3
Summer 2012



Class of 2012



COMING EVENTS

AUGUST

21-23 Teachers' In-service

SEPTEMBER

- 5 First Day of School
- 7 Back-to-school Picnic, 6-8 p.m.
- 14 County Fair Day
Faculty In-service (no classes)
- 23 Back-to-school Meeting, 3- 5 p.m.
- 28 Michaelmas Celebration

OCTOBER

- 12 Grandparents Day
- 20-21 Faculty In-service
with Michael D'Aleo
- 22-26 Prep Days
Parent-teacher Conferences
(no classes)

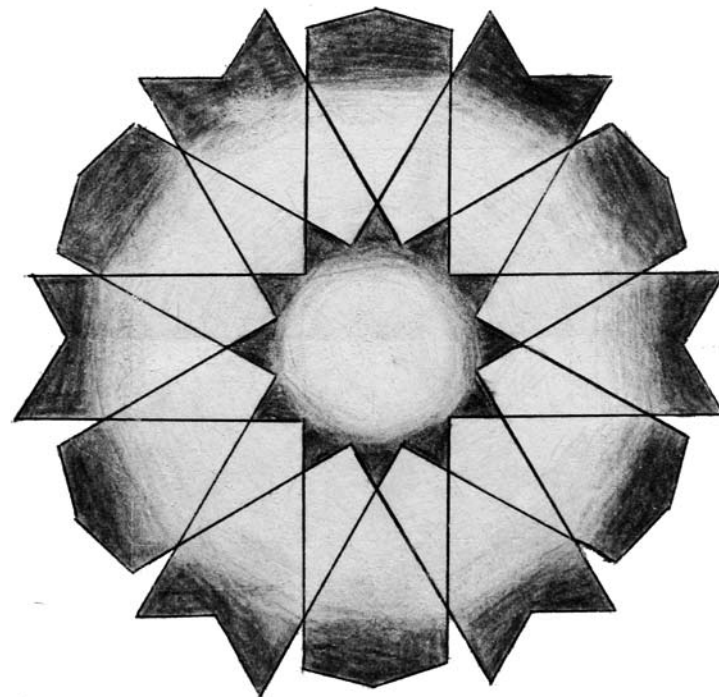
Calendar of the Soul

Week 13

And when I've risen to heights of sense,
There flames up deep within my soul
From fiery spirit worlds
The gods' own word of truth:
In spirit grounds divining seek
To find your spirit kinship.

—Rudolf Steiner

*Translation by John Gardner (July 3, 1912–July 7, 1998),
friend and mentor to Pleasant Ridge*



Greenspace Project, Summer 2012

By Cynthia Olmstead



A longtime dream has been realized this summer with the creation of the Pleasant Ridge Waldorf School Greenspace Project in the area between our school and the Landmark Center. In 2011, we received a small grant from the Paul E. Stry Foundation that was matched in 2012 with funding from Organic Valley and Vernon Memorial Healthcare. The Greenspace Project involved removing the asphalt between the two buildings (formerly part of the East Avenue roadway) and creating a natural outdoor classroom space and greenway for the neighborhood based on permaculture design principles. Permaculture is an approach to designing human settlements and perennial agricultural systems that mimic the complex interrelationships found in nature.

Alumni parent and renowned permaculture expert Mark Shepard helped launch the project this spring by leading a school community workshop in March to talk about permaculture design and develop a site plan through a group planning process. About 20 parents, alumni parents, staff, and teachers formed the group that developed the site design, incorporating ideas of native habitat (prairie and savanna) with some edible landscaping and a rain garden, along with a central gathering space for teaching and small ceremonies. We also designed pathways through the Greenspace that would accommodate the current walking paths across the site. A very generous donation of survey work/research from Paragon Associates helped to define our site boundaries for the project.

Working with Sheldon's Asphalt Paving, we broke ground on June 4. Many of the Sheldon workers were intrigued to be removing

asphalt for this natural space—the opposite of their usual work. Mark then formed several earth mounds on the site, in the shape of a turtle, an eagle, a snake, and a bear, and the entire area was covered with topsoil. Volunteers joined Mark and staff coordinator Cynthia Olmstead to plant trees (burr and swamp white oaks, chestnuts, hazelnuts, cherries), bushes and vines (black currants, raspberries, grapes), and a host of prairie plants. Mark then seeded the entire area with a prairie mix for the mounds and open areas and a grass mix for the pathways. We're now watering daily to enhance the seedling development and nurture the plants, trees, and shrubs, especially during this unusual Wisconsin heat wave. I've worked daily on the Greenspace this past month and am greeted by passersby who share their excitement and appreciation as neighbors, parents, and community members.

Thank you to all of our volunteers and donors who helped make this project a reality—it will be quite an environmental legacy for the school and families as well as for our neighborhood. Thank you to Mark for his leadership, hard work, and generosity in planning and implementing a creative and visionary design for the site. A special thank you to Mary Christenson for helping coordinate the project, and to Arwyn Wildingway, Shannon Landis, and Jim Hallberg for their extra help and enthusiasm for the project. We also appreciate the help and support from the partners with whom we consulted on the project—Steve Clark and Sarah Grainger from the City of Viroqua, and staff from Vernon Telephone, Frontier Communications, and Xcel Energy—and the cooperation of our Landmark Center neighbors.

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Pleasant Ridge Waldorf School

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FEIN 39-1357578

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Pleasant Ridge Waldorf School does not discriminate on the basis of gender, ethnic origin, economic ability, or sexual orientation.

In our efforts to reduce paper use, you may request an electronic copy by emailing cynthia@pleasantrydwaldorf.org.

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Materials/Equipment/Plants Seeds/Supplies

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Cynthia Olmstead
Kevin Prevost
Joe & Freya Rising
Sandra Schmidt
Brian Wickert
Arwyn Wildingway

A TRIBUTE

The following speech was given at the eighth grade graduation for Drew Shonka's class of 2012. Sarah Kamin, class parent and former colleague in both the Eurythmy and Early Childhood programs, gives us a beautiful picture of the relationship between class teacher and parents as well as class teacher and students. Thank you to Sarah for a fine tribute and to Drew for a fine class!

Good evening, and a warm welcome to the proud families of the graduating eighth grade class. My name is Sarah Kamin. I am a parent to one of the eighth-graders, a former kindergarten teacher to several of the graduates, a colleague to Drew, and a friend to the Shonka family. It is an honor to have been asked to speak in tribute to Drew tonight and to be the voice to express the swell of appreciation the parents in this class are feeling.

I remember the faculty meeting in which Drew's application for the first grade teaching position was reviewed. I remember it like yesterday, as one does a destiny moment. It was held in what is now the music room. I remember the dust floating on the afternoon light and the person sitting to my right.

The faculty worked then, and still does, out of a consensus model of decision making, which means that everyone has to agree; one veto vote puts an end to the whole idea. Obviously everyone agreed that Drew was the right one to take on this class. In the course of the interview we recognized the qualities of a good teacher: an artistic, soul-creative capacity; humor; steadiness of bearing; a wealth of interesting life stories. But Drew had very limited teaching experience, and these qualities were as yet untested in the classroom. In the end, in my memory, Drew was hired for his humanity.

Having been a part of that decision making, and having held that responsibility in my hand either to lift in agreement or not, created for me a sense of investment. There was my professional interest, but also Drew was hired to be my son's first grade teacher, and I wanted to help make that work, as I am sure every parent in the class can understand. At some point we have all raised our hands in support of Drew being our children's teacher.

However, eight years is a long time to have your hand raised. There have been challenging times—we fall in and out of that sense of involvement. But through it all, through the years, Drew has persevered. The steadiness we recognized in him has endured. He has been steadfast. Like a plow horse yoked to a wagon, he has brought this class forward, tilling the fertile soil of their souls, through eight yearlong fields.

There is a quality of Drew's, among the many, that is most of the essence tonight, namely, his interest in who our children are and what they might become. I'd like to pause for a moment and ask you all to remember that special teacher who, beyond the skills of their subject, recognized you, who beheld you, so to speak... And then, if you can, to call forth the feeling of that recognition. I hope you can all identify such a teacher. Otherwise, perhaps it is time to return to school—there are openings in next year's first grade class!

I was a young adult when I first experienced that feeling of being seen and known. In me, it was a feeling of worthiness. In my estimation, the children in this class have experienced something of this on a daily basis. That experience of recognition fosters a sense of self, which develops into a capacity to sense others.

The hallmark of this class is their harmony with each other. That does not happen by itself, and it hasn't always been there. It has been gained by Drew's commitment to inclusion and community and how, by his supporting their sense of self, they in turn have become able to recognize and support each other.

I have gradually come to realize that Waldorf education is radical in more ways than its beautifully painted walls and the practice of waiting to teach children to read until they are truly ready. It isn't, in fact, about any conventional measurement of academic standard. It is fundamentally about social and cultural renewal. Using that standard to assess this class, I can affirm that Drew has done a remarkable deed.



I don't know how Drew became aware of the need for a first grade teacher here eight years ago. I do know that it was his wife Geri who, characteristically, was first interested in Waldorf education and imagined herself as a teacher. So, truly, we have a two-for-one special here.

But I can imagine the classifieds of the *Minneapolis Star Tribune* spread out on the Shonka kitchen table eight years ago, among the crumbs of a Sunday morning breakfast and coffee drippings. Drew's oldest children, Leo and Ivy, are in the living room watching Sunday morning cartoons and knitting. Sylvi, the youngest, is just a babe mewing in her mother's arms. Drew is scanning the classified columns: Glamour photographer piques his interest. He looks up sheepishly at Geri—no, that wouldn't work. Five-Star Restaurant Cook—always interested in food, Drew considers this, but it would mean difficult hours for the family.

And finally: Superhero needed for a Waldorf first grade class. Singer, songwriter, poet, storyteller, scientist, stand-up comedian, with command of the following subjects: ancient and modern history, mathematics and geometry, mineralogy, zoology, anatomy, physics, astronomy, and botany (avid interest in every other known subject required). Only applicants with experience in the following will be considered: family and relationship counseling, child psychology, international diplomacy, nonprofit public funding, three-ring circus management. Disclaimer: This position may be harmful to your health, stressful on family life, and financially disastrous. And Drew thinks, "I can do that."

Well, you did it, Drew, and you have definitely earned your Superhero cape!

But first, a quieter token of appreciation. The transformation of a teacher to meet the changing needs of a class through eight years amazes me. It is required year to year, but also from block to block, and overnight from one day to the next. Where these class teachers pull it out of is a great wonder to me. And how it happens between the time Drew rolls out of bed and when he is standing in front of the class saying the morning verse, I don't know. I have looked for the infamous red telephone booth, well known to Superman fans, in the five blocks between his house and school, but I didn't find it. So here, Drew, I present you with this miniature phone booth, for quiet hours of contemplation at your desk to ponder "daily transformation" and what you might be asked to morph into next. Whatever it is, our blessings. (Sarah presented Drew with a small metal phone booth.)

And now for the cape. Geri, this is sized to fit two. We know it has been a team effort. Thank you. (Sarah gave Drew and Geri a beautifully appliquéd, red cape.)

To the class, I would like to say: There are seemingly dark days ahead. You, your generation, are inheriting, in our country, a magnificent fixer-upper. You each have your special skills to bring to the project. It is going to be better than it was before, than it is now—if you will it and can work together. Your time here—warming and shaping beeswax into animal figurines, trying for that elusive perfect circle in eurythmy, learning the bones of the human body—was it not time well spent? And the answers to many of the challenges and questions you will face can be looked for in the harmony you have experienced with each other and the tapestry of friendship you have woven together.

CALYX CLASS PLAYS



Grades One: *A Child of Good Fortune*



Grade Two & Three: *Noah's Ark*



Grade Four: *A Song of Kalevala*



Grade Five: *Orpheus and the Nine Muses*



Grade Six: *The Road to Damascus*



Grade Seven: *Much Ado About Nothing*



Grade Eight: *Grease*



SCHOOL NEWS

State Honors Orchestra and Choir

Congratulations to 2012 graduates Elizabeth Dehlin and Kenny Hoversten for successfully auditioning into the WSMA Middle Level State Honors Orchestra and Choir, respectively. Only 10 percent of the middle school students who audition are chosen to participate. In October, Elizabeth and Kenny will join select students from all over the state in a two-day rehearsal and performance in Madison. This is a huge honor for both of these students and for their music teacher, Monika Sutherland.

Farewells

Our beloved **Kelly Jansen**, who has calmly and efficiently managed the office in her role of secretary for the past 20 years, has retired as of June 30. We will all miss her calm and

joyful presence in the office, and wish her many relaxing days in the Big Horn Mountains, her favorite vacation destination.

Anna Rodriguez, assistant in the Rosemary Kindergarten, is leaving her position at the school to pursue her artwork. She is a founding member of The Ark, a community art center now being formed in the former Believers Fellowship Church, across the street from Pleasant Ridge. Anna will still be involved in the school as a parent of Odin, who is in Mr. Schmidt's up and coming seventh grade class.

Many thanks to **Philothea Bezin**, founding teacher at Pleasant Ridge and French teacher extraordinaire, who graciously taught the seventh and eighth grade classes this year, while her foreign language compatriot, Kate Bergan, eased her way into teaching Spanish full-time. We look forward to seeing Philothea's smiling face

and wonderful outfits from across the way as she continues to teach French at Youth Initiative High School.

Drew Shonka, graduating eighth grade teacher, has bid us a fond farewell as he jumps into a year of new and exciting work (exact nature of said work is unknown as of press time). We wish Drew many wonderful adventures in the year ahead, and look forward to regular updates! Drew will still be involved in the school as a parent of Ivy (grade seven) and Sylvi (grade three).

Paint Donation

We are very grateful to the True Value Foundation's Painting a Brighter Future grant program, through Nelson Agri-Center, for donating 16 gallons of paint. It will be used to brighten up and protect our cherished Old Main Building this summer.

A Clear Picture

The following letter was sent to the parents in Barbara Danner's class this spring. Those of us who read it, Barbara's colleagues, appreciated the reminder it gave us of how to work with the behavioral challenges that the children bring into the classroom. We hope that all of the parents in the school, not just these parents, can help us in holding the children this way.

Dear Parents,

I would like to offer a challenge to you. As you may have observed, there has been some challenging behavior in the classroom and on the playground.

First, a little story: I went to Easter services at the Christian Community church in Chicago on Sunday. There was a young woman and her brother there whom I had not seen in a while. When they were younger they were very dear friends of my daughters. The young woman asked about my teaching and I told her what a wonderful year the class had been having until recently when it had fallen into social turmoil. A look of troubled embarrassment came over her face and she said, "I can't believe some of the things I did in grade school." This young woman who had been so dear to my

own daughter had also inflicted her with much scorn in their middle school years. I had often found myself with many unpleasant thoughts about her. Recently, however, as I watched her grow into her character, I have seen a kind and beautiful soul emerge. I am so grateful not to ever have spoken my thoughts aloud though I am sad that I thought them. I know that my daughter was no angel in middle school and I have seen her pour her own abuse upon her sisters, but I have also watched her grow into a thoughtful young woman who is seeking her hardest to bring beauty and goodness into a harsh world.

Our children are continually in process. What we see is neither who they are nor who they will be. We experience their behavior, good or bad, and yet this is not who they are either. They are making their way into the world, trying to find ways to get their needs met: needs for approval, or friendship, or warmth, or success. They are not very good at it yet, and often do things that backfire and give them the opposite of what they need. We all know how frustrating that can be.

Now my challenge to you: When you see or experience a child, your own or someone else's, whose behavior is challenging those around them, you can make a little meditation. First, imagine them at their very best—clean, happy, kind, and respectful. When you have a good picture of them, send it out into the universe; share that picture with the whole cosmos. Then imagine them at their very worst: inappropriately dressed, defiant, disrespectful, and mean. When you have that picture clear in your mind, draw the picture of that child toward you. In your mind's eye, give them the warmest hug you can. They are asking for and needing some serious soul warmth. Do that for your children and for each other's children. It cannot hurt them or you, and it might help.

Here at school we will keep doing our best to help your children feel safe enough so that they can continue this process, working their way slowly, oh so slowly at times, to healthy human interactions.

Blessings,
Barbara Danner

Waldorf education teaches students that we human beings live in relationships—lots of them—and that people make essential creative contributions to the development of culture and society. Taking that perspective, Pleasant Ridge Waldorf School thrives due to the bounty of relationships that have built up around and within the school for the past 33 years. As a living system, our school continually develops and regenerates itself through the efforts of the families and staff.

Most families stay connected in some way even after their children graduate. Maureen O'Connor, who had children in the school from 1990 until 2008, is now in her 20th year serving on the finance committee and in other governing groups. Daniel Arnold, founding parent, still comes in to check the boilers on cold winter mornings. Julee Caspers Agar, whose youngest child graduated in 2002, continues to give of her time as a guest teacher. These volunteer actions are remarkable, but there are also many smaller ways that people make an important impact. No gift is too small or too large, as the saying goes.

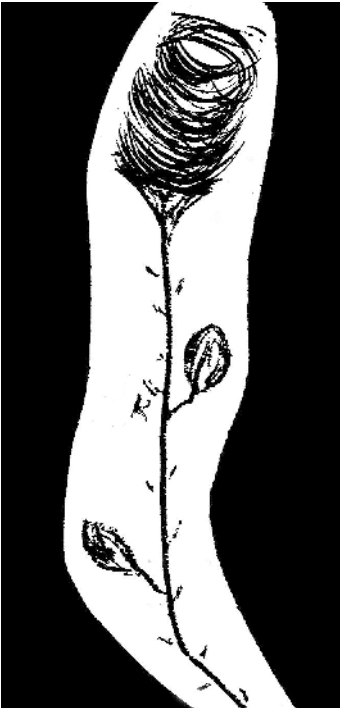
This year's graduating eighth grade students and their parents donated \$3,100 to the school as their gesture of gratitude to and awareness of the community that supported them. If you ever have the opportunity to hear eighth grade student testimonials at graduation, you will see that they indeed develop this awareness of the interrelationships that surround them.

We feel enormous gratitude for all of you who find some way to show your interest in what we are doing—from giving of your time to providing in-kind or financial contributions. Sometimes “giving time” takes the form of a conversation that leads to a new relationship. Often it involves giving rhythmical attention to the school's functions by being on a committee or serving hot lunch. We appreciate whatever you can do.



We are developing a type of permaculture in the social realm. Like a permaculture system whose sum is far more diverse and vibrant than any of its parts could be alone, we develop communities of students, parents, staff, alumni, extended families, and friends. Through our activities we constantly seek to reinforce the health-giving, autonomous, and self-renewing relationships between our members. Together we carry vision, build heart-centered connections, and do the work that needs doing.

—Mary Christenson, Development Director



ARE WE IN YOUR WILL?

Name the Pleasant Ridge Waldorf School in your will or trust to leave a lasting legacy of support for the school.

A bequest can be for a specific dollar amount or for a percentage of the remaining balance in your estate after other bequests have been fulfilled.

Our tax ID is #39-1357578. Call Mary Christenson at (608)637-8504 if you'd like to find out more, or if you'd just like to let us know about your bequest.

DONORS

Many thanks to those who have supported our school January 12, 2011 – June 30, 2012

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David White (Grateful Grains)

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- Honor friends and family members with a tribute gift

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The Sustainers Circle is a donor group consisting of members and friends of Pleasant Ridge Waldorf School who have committed to making a planned gift valued at \$10,000 or more to the school.

For more information contact Mary Christenson

Phone: 608-637-8504 Email: mary@pleasantrygewaldorf.org

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