

CALYX

PLEASANT RIDGE
WALDORF SCHOOL

Waldorf Education since 1980

Volume 46, Issue 3
Fall 2025



**PLEASANT RIDGE
WALDORF SCHOOL**
431 East Court Street, Viroqua

COMING EVENTS

OCTOBER

- 3 Kindergarten In-Service, no school Kindergarten
- 17 Grandparents & Special Friends Day Assembly, 8:15 a.m.
- 25 All-School Workday
- 29 Faculty In-Service, no school
- 30-31 Parent-Teacher Conferences, no school

NOVEMBER

- 7 Martinmas Lantern Walk in evening
- 14 Assembly, 8:15 a.m.
- 26-28 Thanksgiving Break, no school

DECEMBER

- 5-6 Holiday Faire
- 8-9 Advent Spiral
- 12 Santa Lucia
- 19 Kindergarten early dismissal, 10:30 a.m.
Festival of Light, 10:45 a.m.
Grades early dismissal, 12 p.m.
- 22-31 Holiday Break, no school

JANUARY

- 1-2 Holiday Break, no school
- 19 MLK Jr. Assembly, 2 p.m.



Save the Date!

**Grandparents and Special Friends Day
October 17, 8 a.m.–12 p.m.**

Please contact Kim Anderson with questions.
608-637-8504
Kim.Anderson@pleasantridgewaldorf.org

Holiday Faire, December 5–6

The Holiday Faire committee is looking to add new members!
Please contact Kelly Slentz for more information.
608-638-0824
Kelly.Slentz@pleasantridgewaldorf.org

SCHOOL NEWS

34th Annual Pentathlon



On Wednesday, May 14, 5th grade Waldorf students from the Madison Waldorf School, City of Lakes Waldorf School, Minnesota Waldorf School, and Da Vinci Waldorf School joined Pleasant Ridge Waldorf School at Sugar Creek Bible Camp in Ferryville, Wisconsin, for the official opening of the 34th annual Pentathlon.

These games have a long tradition in Waldorf schools throughout the world, as they arise out of the 5th grade curriculum where the students engage in the study of Greece and Rome. From early on in their experience at Waldorf schools, children hear about the Fifth Grade Pentathlon, making it a much-anticipated milestone event. Throughout the school year, Ms. AnnaJo, our movement teacher, worked with Ms. Beck's 5th grade class to prepare students to compete in five athletic events: long jump, sprinting, discus, javelin, and Greek wrestling. By tradition, on Wednesday afternoon, the 5th grade students sang "Glorious Apollo" in the school and then dashed down the hall to head off for the games, with the entire PRWS student body applauding and wishing them good luck.

A total of 69 students from the five schools were divided into five "City States": Olympia, Athens, Sparta, Corinth, and Ithaca. They participated in the sporting events and shared meals within these groups. On Thursday, May 15, Greek gods Zeus and Athena (seniors from our neighboring Youth Initiative High School) opened the games, holding the Pentathlon flame high. Then the City State teams, led by their leaders, began their first contest and moved through each of the five events. More high school students acted as witnesses, noting each student's strengths, watching for a synthesis of Truth and Beauty in each event.

During the closing ceremony, each athlete received a medal to honor their participation and the training they had undergone. The festivities concluded with a delicious Greek Feast for the students, their parents, and their teachers to celebrate their accomplishments.

Congratulations to the Class of 2028 students from all five participating Waldorf schools!

May Day Festival



May in southwest Wisconsin got off to a chilly and rainy start, but that didn't take away from the joyous May Day celebration we held on Friday, May 2! Bringing the school community together to welcome the warmer days ahead and honor the beauty of nature's renewal, the event is a beloved annual tradition for students, staff, and parents alike. Worldwide, Waldorf schools have been celebrating May Day since 1919. Students and teachers

wearing flower crowns sang their way to the playground to meet family and friends 'round the Maypole, where they performed dances, weaving ribbons in intricate patterns.

Graduation

The 8th grade students, Ms. Hotchkiss, and the 8th grade families put on a beautiful graduation ceremony. A highlight of the ceremony was all of the parents gathered in front of the audience to sing a song to their graduating children. Lyrics and musical accompaniment were provided by the parents.

Lyrics set to "Learning to Fly," by Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers:

*Well you started out in this very room.
Crossed the Rainbow Bridge in smaller shoes.
So many have helped since that first day.
In our hearts they'll always stay.*

*Learning to fly under steady wings,
Building the strength to do hard things.*

*Things were humming along but got off track,
You studied at home and in a greenhouse
out back.
Your teachers and parents, a tireless crew,
Pulled together to guide you through.*

*Learning to fly through the clouds.
Keep a steady course 'til the sun comes out.*

*We could hear you coming from down the hall.
Sarcastic wit and dodgeball.
Hauling a case of Macro bars,
We still could tell you were going far.*

*Learning to fly and test your wings.
Did you really eat every single thing?*

*Now if we singers have offended.
Hear but this, and all is mended:
As you depart this place you've known,
We're mighty proud of how you've grown.*

*Learning to fly, now spread your wings.
Wherever you go, you'll do great things!*

*Learning to fly, (Learning to fly)
now spread your wings (Learning to fly)
Wherever you go, (Learning to fly)
you'll do great things! (Learning to fly)
Learning to fly, learning to fly
Learning to fly, learning to fly....*

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In our efforts to reduce paper use, you may request an electronic copy by emailing kelly.slentz@pleasantridgewaldorf.org.

Cover: Grade 4 field trip to Dawn and Vince Hundt's farm Spring 2025.

CURRICULUM

Movement

The education impulse set in motion by Rudolf Steiner more than 100 years ago was given form by visionary people of that time. Today at PRWS we are stewarding the education of another generation of youth, still moved by these impulses but transformed by time and the generations of teachers who have shared their wisdom in the intervening decades. In writing today, I acknowledge the teachers before me upon whose shoulders I stand.

Pleasant Ridge Waldorf, like many schools, began small with a single class teacher for the grades and another for kindergarten, and those teachers led everything. Specialty programs that fill out a school's curriculum after its earliest configurations are born of needs that a school discovers over time. While movement and language arts and music may be part of the core curriculum and reside within many class teachers' capacities, offering programming enhanced by specialization enriches the students' education experience and is widely practiced in Waldorf schools worldwide.

Tending children's physical development involves more than sport alone but is also enhanced marvelously by sport. This is the playground of a physical education or "Movement" teacher in a Waldorf school today.

The first physical education teacher of the original Waldorf school in Germany was tasked with bringing the youth into the awareness and increased ability to orient themselves within the planes of space: the frontal, the sagittal, and the



horizontal. Fritz Von Bothmer did this work and created a body of exercises known as Bothmer Gymnastics, with useful applications that assist in this learning to this day. The further study of mastery informed by the archetypes of circles, spirals, lines, curves, spheres, and vortexes inspired the system of Spacial Dynamics, created by Jaimen McMillan, which has further assisted in enhancing the curricular components of Movement education programs in Waldorf schools today.

The task of teaching physical education is far greater than the mere introduction of sport. Striving for mastery of any form of physical activity involves steps that, while grounded in physical forms of specific skills, can be accessed, enhanced, learned and taught in a myriad of ways. In other words, becoming good at something includes far more than the physical realm.

Faced with a simple challenge of jumping over a rope or throwing and catching a ball, how can one begin? First, at the physical level, obtain a rope or a ball. With this object present, already something new is possible that wasn't possible before. Thus we begin with the physical, which is a wonderful playground all by itself.

However, to cross over a rope or toss and catch a ball, more is needed to bring a student into the dimension of these activities. There must be direction. The human being must move in order to cross the rope. The ball must be released in order to interact with forces of gravity and return it to the earth or to the hands of the one who tossed it. There must be rhythm or timing, because you cannot land on the ground again if you haven't left yet, nor can a ball be caught or fly anywhere before it is released. There is a lawful order to things that must be followed.

Additionally, there must be a living picture of the idea of what one hopes to accomplish. The image of the jump rope crossed and the ball released and caught again must live in the space in

which one endeavors to do the action. It must live in the imagination of the actor. When one imaginatively completes the task in the space around oneself before beginning the physical task, the physical forms can follow these shapes in space. We recognize the results: The ball is released with measure and returns to the hands of the tosser, like a yo-yo returning home. The jumper sends themselves into the earth in such a way that they lift into the air in perfect timing with the rhythm of the spinning rope. These mini moments of mastery build the stepping stones of how we come to experience ourselves as capable of maneuvering in this world. With practice, more things are possible.

My task as a teacher is, quite simply, to create circumstances within which children will lean toward the exploration and discovery of their capacities in the face of a wide variety of physical phenomena. When we are many, can a circle form? Can the circle dissolve and form again? Can the threat of a hungry wolf (someone who is "it") help us all practice these other forms of gathering and dispersing while striving for speed and sometimes seeking safety? The best games create small playgrounds with specific rules within which tasks can be practiced and mastery is an achievable destination. The best games offer diverse roles and diverse challenges that students, with practice, can interchangeably take up by choice or assignment.

At the school today, I teach the younger grades and also prepare the 5th grade for the Pentathlon as the themed physical learning task for their 5th grade year. As a teacher, I lean into the creative realm of making motivating reasons for children to enter into as wide a range of actions as I can find, create, or imagine. Playing outside in all seasons, and using the diverse geography of local parks, various outdoor and indoor spaces, and the playground, provide the creative context for the Movement curriculum at our school.

AnnaJo Doerr, Movement Teacher

Faculty Spotlight: Aaron Schmidt

Based on interview in Spring of 2025



What brought you to Pleasant Ridge and Viroqua?

In 2006, I was teaching at Highland Hall Waldorf School in Northridge, California, which is part of the greater Los Angeles area. The 8th grade class I was teaching at the time would graduate that June, and I was looking at the possibility of change before starting a new cycle. I visited a number of schools with a bit of a list of things that my family and I were looking for. Pleasant Ridge and Wisconsin were not on my radar at all! But after a visit in April, I couldn't ignore the pull that I felt toward the school and the community. We found things we didn't even realize we wanted. We hadn't been in a place like this before. My children were in 3rd and 5th grades at the time, and the possibility of a slower childhood for them was also a significant draw. I wanted to be part of what was happening here.

What was your teaching experience before Pleasant Ridge?

I taught for five years at Highland Hall, the last two as a class teacher. I was originally hired as a substitute coordinator, but pretty soon the faculty chair suggested I begin subbing myself in where there was need. At the time, I was in the midst of pursuing my undergraduate degree in education, as well as beginning the Waldorf Teacher Training Course at WISC (Waldorf Institute of Southern California). It was a lot of education, but I was immersed and it felt inspiring and good. Some days I might step in for an entire day of 7th grade. The next day, I might be subbing a 2nd grade main lesson, 4th grade math skills, 11th grade economics, and nap relief in the Kindergarten. In my third and fourth years, I served as a high school class sponsor. I loved all of it and regard this beginning in Waldorf education as invaluable to my understanding of the scope and power of the curriculum.

Why do you feel Waldorf education is important?

For parents who believe in an unhurried childhood and a developmentally appropriate version of education—without the burden of over-intellectualization in the early years—

Waldorf education provides a safe haven. It's important to provide an experience for the children wherein they have a chance to go deeply into the subjects they are studying and to have experiences with nature, art, and the sciences that go further than the surface-level experience that I associate with my own education.

When you are with them for years as a teacher, you have the opportunity to know who they are and who they are becoming and to teach to those young people. Our education helps children to develop their own discernment about what is important, eventually allowing the freedom to express that discernment, that critical thinking, in their own lives. We hope to guide them toward a freedom of spirit, and it is an honor to watch that spirit develop. One hopes that the work radiates out into the world through these students.

How long have you been at PRWS and what have you taught? What are you teaching now?

I'm in my nineteenth year at Pleasant Ridge. I completed two full cycles with the Classes of 2014 and 2022 and am now with my third Pleasant Ridge class in Grade 3.

This is the year (age 8 to 9) in which a child's ego, their sense of themselves as an individual separate from their parents, siblings, friends, teachers emerges, or begins to emerge. This is differentiated from the early childhood gesture of imitation and dreaminess. Third graders want to know why—at least as far as their attention allows! But they are seeking to order and balance the world around them. We follow that impulse as we explore the practical aspect of what it is to be a human being on the earth—how different people in different places survive, work, struggle, and thrive. Farm visits, shelter, measurement of all kinds, including the rhythms of the year—time, seasons. How many minutes and seconds in a day? Tablespoons in a gallon? We deepen our experience of numbers and our previous arithmetic work including long division. We take up cursive writing, as well, which we are doing right now!

We have a building project ahead in which the children ideally do the bulk of the work: measuring, sawing, hammering, working with wood and tools. Our class will make Leopold benches for the outdoor stage at Growing for Good.

What is it like teaching in the lower grades?

In the lower grades, they are delighted by everything. The expression of it is so enthusiastic and genuine and free. It can look like chaos, but it's just big feelings of happiness and delight. It's a lovely environment to be in, if occasionally a lot. They still live in a world that delights them. It's best to be delighted right along with them. I get to be the captain of this ship upon which all the sailors are still enthusiastically saying, "Great! Yes, Mr. Schmidt, let's do it!" In the

lower grades they are very curious, but it's a fleeting curiosity. You can't go into too much numbing detail. We live in the experience—the doing and the feeling.

What is it like teaching in the upper grades?

In the upper grades, they still say "Yes, Mr. Schmidt!" but a veil falls over how freely they share their feelings. The delight is a little bit muted. Their curiosity is definitely still there. The why is different, because something else has woken up in them; a sense of dichotomy permeates everything. The sense of right and wrong, true and untrue, just and unjust lives in the upper grades really strongly. We study revolutions, revolutionary thought, and the conversations are mature and rich and nuanced. We look deeply at the world around us, seeking questions and then the answers that go with them. In the upper grades, especially in the sciences but in history, too, we try to work out of a question rather than an explanation. The teacher tries not to get in the way of the students answering it for themselves. And we give room for their experiences to be differentiated. From one day to the next, they are developing their own wisdom.

Being a part of the process of young people aligning their sense of what is true in themselves with what they see around them is a very humbling experience. To facilitate that experience feels so significant.

What do you love about Pleasant Ridge?

I love that most people make a conscious effort to find this place and have to work to get here. So many people find Viroqua and Pleasant Ridge because they are looking for something different. This lends itself to the strength of the parent community, the nature of gratitude, connection, commitment. So many children are a product of that kind of impulse.

I love my colleagues. I've been here long enough to see many colleagues making sacrifices to continue in this work, who believe in the important mission of Waldorf education. I love the opportunities for collaboration and being part of a group of striving individuals. I have seen the benefits of us working through the challenges together. That we are all in this together—parents and teachers—is really inspiring and enlivening.

What do you hope for Pleasant Ridge in the future?

I want it to go on as it is, to stay true to the path we've been on: a dedicated Waldorf school experience for anyone who is looking for it. The back-to-the-landers who founded the school in 1979 were pretty fierce about being independent and creating experiences for children that aligned with their idea of a good world. We need to continue to resist the impulse to speed things along at the cost of childhood. I want Pleasant Ridge to continue to be a safe haven for childhood.

—Kelly Slentz, Development Director

ALUMNI

Spotlight: Hanna Agar Karlstad

Class of 1999

Class Teacher: Laura Negronida/Michael Wright

Introduction:

Hanna graduated 8th grade with the class of 1999, taught by Laura Negronida (grades 1 through 4) and Michael Wright (grades 5 through 8). Her husband and fellow PRWS alumnus, Brendan Karlstad (also class of 1999), have two children: Mila, who is in second grade at Pleasant Ridge, and Sequoia (age 4). Hanna's was the first non-combined class (meaning a single grade level rather than multiple grades mixed) to graduate from PRWS.

Hanna earned a BFA in photography and, before moving back to Viroqua, spent five years in New York City working with and learning from many incredible photographers. Currently a commercial and portrait photographer, she creates magical and whimsical conceptual portraits. Check out her amazing work at hannaagarportraits.com and at hannaagar.com.

What Hanna considers fun these days includes playing hockey in the winter, enjoying live music in the summer, gathering with friends, and getting to fold laundry without interruption!



What do you remember about your class teacher? Other teachers?

Laura Negronida was the class teacher for grades 1 through 4. I remember her super long, beautiful gray hair. The girls would enjoy braiding her hair during free-play times. I also warmly remember Laura reading to the class during rest time.

Michael Wright then took over the class in 5th grade. He had recently graduated a class and was the father of my classmate and good friend, Amanda Wright. Michael was an energetic and fun teacher. He was also a musician. In the upper grades, music class became a bit of a jam band session. We learned Beatles and Grateful Dead songs and even recorded songs on cassettes to sell.

I remember in particular math class with Michael. Whichever student finished first had the opportunity to check their answers against the teacher's answers. Another student and I would most often compete for that honor. If a student found a mistake in the teacher's work, we got a shark tooth! It was a cool lesson in itself: to not assume that the teacher is always right and to be confident in your own work.

Other teachers I remember well include Diane Mamroe, who taught Eurythmy, and Nanette Tuttle, who taught Handwork. We had two language teachers: Connie Vanderhyden for Spanish, who was so sweet, and Frau Cepak for German, who was a little strict! And of course, my own mother, Julee Caspers Agar, taught World Dance and Social Dance.

What are your favorite memories from Pleasant Ridge?

I always enjoyed the annual class play, particularly in the upper grades. I enjoyed the challenge of memorizing lines, the dressing up, the opportunity to not be shy. My class performed Joan of Arc in 7th grade and As You Like It in 8th grade. I noticed that the background my class made for As You Like It is still in use and appeared in my daughter Mila's first grade play! I continued to do theater in high school (Westby) and college (University of Wisconsin in Eau Claire). I majored in art in college and almost double-majored in theater.

The class camping trips are another highlight among my memories. Michael actually lived on land close to my family's farm outside of Westby and welcomed the class there for their camping adventures.

What do you appreciate most about PRWS?

One of the things I appreciate most about PRWS is how there is an element of creativity and creation in so many of the lessons. You don't just sit and learn. Well, you sit and learn but then you draw something or build something

or perform something from the lesson so that your whole body and mind are involved in the learning process.

Are you involved with the school today?

Parent! Marketing committee and Holiday Faire decorating volunteer.

PRWS Class of 2021

We want to wish the PRWS Class of 2021 the best as they move on to new adventures post high school. We were excited to hear from some alumni and are happy to share their plans for this school year.

Reid Brown

High school attended: Laurel High School

College to attend Fall 2025: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge, MA

Emma Brudos

High school attended: Viroqua High School

College to attend Fall 2025: University of Wisconsin–Eau Claire

Grey Madura

High school attended: Youth Initiative High School

College to attend Fall 2025: Lawrence University, Appleton, WI

Wynne Roberts

High school attended: Laurel High School

College to attend Fall 2025: St. Olaf College, Northfield, MN

Sophia Thomas

High school attended: Youth Initiative High School

College to attend Fall 2025: Northern Michigan University, Marquette, MI

Zachary Whitaker

High school attended: Westby High School

College to attend Fall 2025: Winona State University, Winona, MN

Development Message

Thanks to the generosity of our community, the Development Department has surpassed our budget goals for fiscal year 2025, helping to keep our school financially sound going into the 2025–2026 school year.

Not only did we receive many generous donations but we also raised funds through several other avenues, including the annual raffle, the Holiday Faire, the Kwik Trip Gift Card program, and our school store (located both in the school and at Ewetopia). A huge and heartfelt thank you to our donors and to all who participated in these initiatives!

In the 2024–2025 school year, we were also fortunate to receive funds via grants from the Association for Therapeutic Eurythmy in North America, Waldorf Schools Fund, and the Rudolf Steiner Charitable Trust to support our eurythmy and therapeutic eurythmy programs.

The Development Committee also achieved our nonfinancial goals for the year:

- After a hiatus, the Development Committee is now meeting regularly again! Thank you to Mary Christenson, Doug Detrick, and Kim Anderson for sharing your time and talents. We have reviewed all things PRWS Development related and are taking steps toward continuous improvement, researching new grants to apply for, rethinking the school store, and better promoting our Kwik Trip Gift Card program.
- We have a plan to celebrate PRWS's 45th anniversary, and to capitalize on this opportunity both to build and strengthen relationships in the community and to raise money for the school. (See related message below.)
- We are taking steps to revitalize our alumni program, and we could use your help! If you are an alum—student, parent, or staff—please reach out to Kelly Slentz at Kelly.Slentz@pleasantridgewaldorf.org or visit our Alumni webpage (<https://pleasantridgewaldorf.org/our-school/alumni/>) to provide your updated contact information.

45th Anniversary!

Pleasant Ridge has completed 45 school years! Each milestone in our school's timeline is an opportunity to celebrate our founding date, reflect on the past, and look toward the future. It's an occasion to celebrate with alumni, students, and parents and to strengthen community connections, showcase our achievements, and enhance our public image. We will celebrate throughout the school year with smaller events to mark the milestone. Stay tuned!

—Kelly Slentz, Development Director

DONORS

Many thanks to all who have supported the work of our school March 1, 2025, through June 30, 2025

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If you are a holder of a Kwik Rewards Plus credit card or debit card, you have the option to designate PRWS to receive a donation check from Kwik Trip in lieu of your three cents per gallon gas discount and in-store instant pricing discounts. In addition, Kwik Trip will donate to PRWS 5 percent of the amount of your in-store purchases.

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PRWS receives these donations via Kwik Trip quarterly. Thank you for your support!

Remembering Dawn Smith Hundt



Our dear friend Dawn Hundt crossed the threshold of death on Friday, July 4, 2025, in the presence of her husband Vince, their children, and a few close friends who had been caring for her in her home. Dawn was a beloved parent of four Pleasant Ridge students (and a grandmother of ten children), dedicated to the health and development of the school and to blazing a path for high school students who wanted a Waldorf education. I was fortunate to know and work with Dawn in various capacities and to be a friend for the past 32 years. Those years characterized the movement from “pioneer” to “administrative” stage in any organization. Dawn was a great pioneer and organizer!

The Hundts began their Waldorf journey in 1989 with their first son, Jacob. During those early years, the school consisted of the Old Main Building, a small cottage, and a house on Decker Street. As a member of the Board of Directors and the Long-Range Planning Committee, Dawn helped to steward the school to its permanent home on East Court Street in 1995, where it could grow to serve children through 8th grade. In 1996 she was integral in helping to establish Youth Initiative High School next door in the Landmark Center while remaining a very active parent in the classes of her children still attending PRWS. She also championed establishing the whole range of subject classes that the school offers today.

Dawn valued the gifts of Waldorf education that nurture the imagination, develop capacities to support lifelong learning, integrate arts and sciences, and build sustaining community on the ideal of service. She was herself a voracious student who valued Nature as teacher, and cherished community as both safety net and cauldron for personal development. Her life exemplified spiritual striving, compassion for others,

focus to get things done in practical life, and commitment to continue growing personally.

I was recently asked by an alumni parent why their child has such vivid recollections of Dawn. I think her energy in leading a group was so clear: everyone got a role, and each person was necessary for the task. On field trips to their farm, her enthusiasm for happenings there was contagious; she was in love with her plants, gardens, orchard, and the children.

Dawn's years of dedication to these two schools demonstrates how, through volunteering, one can continue to reflect and grow, hone the virtues of group work, be nurtured by the students and one's peers—and leave a legacy built on love. Dawn had hope in the future and shared it with youth who were forming their identity, purpose, and resilience as they moved out into the wider world.

We are immensely grateful and will hold Dawn lovingly in our hearts and minds.

—Mary Christenson, Board Member





PRWS faculty and staff— Front row (left to right): Kelly Slentz, Carrie Treviranus, AnnaJo Doerr, Geri Shonka. Second row: Erin Erkelens, Kate Froeschl, Jordan Brudos, Ronald Schirmer, Melissa Madura, Cheyanne Nash, Beth Krieger-Fritsch, Stephanie Pedretti, Joe Ellerbusch, Shawn Neary. Third row: Aaron Schmidt, Mandy Palen, Martha Buche, Kim Anderson, Christina Hotchkiss, Hannah Hastings, Annah Brown, Whitney Hansel, Elaine Schmid, Shihhan Chou, Susan Beck. Not pictured: Kate Bergen, Susana Ruder, Sarah Rowe, Sabina Myzka, Sofya Hundt, Julie Turino, Mike Severson, Marc LeMaire.

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