

# CALYX

PLEASANT RIDGE  
WALDORF SCHOOL

Waldorf Education since 1980

Volume 47, Issue 1  
Winter 2026



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

## COMING EVENTS

### FEBRUARY

13 Lunar New Year Celebration  
 Assembly, 8:15 a.m.

16-20 Winter Break, no school

### MARCH

6 Assembly, 8:15 a.m.

16-19 8th Grade Project Presentations

20 Faculty In-Service, no school

28 Raffle Party, 5 p.m.

### APRIL

3 Assembly, 8:15 a.m.

6-10 Spring Break, no school

9-10 Potential Make-up Days

25 All-School Workday

### MAY

1 May Day Celebration, 12:45 p.m.

14 Pentathlon for 5th Grade

15 Faculty In-Service, no school

25 Memorial Day, no school

29 Kindergarten Dismissal, 10:30 a.m.

Closing Day Assembly, 10:45 a.m.

Grades Dismissal, 12 p.m.

End of Year Picnic, 12 p.m.

Graduation, 6 p.m.



## Save the Date!

### Observation Mornings

**February 11 & April 22, 8:30 a.m.**

Monthly Observation Mornings, formerly known as "WOW Days," offer a window into the classrooms and the magic of Waldorf education. Parents, grandparents, friends and neighbors (adults only, please) are warmly invited to attend. Here, participants will have the opportunity to observe a portion of the morning's Main Lesson in both lower and upper grades.

*February 11: Even Grades / April 22: Odd Grades*

### Alumni Parent Potluck

**PRWS Gym, February 12, 4 p.m.**

We warmly invite all Alumni Parents for an evening of reconnection, conversation, and shared memories with fellow parents. Classrooms will be open for touring throughout the evening and we will have memorabilia on display. Please bring a dish to pass, along with your own plate, utensils, and napkin. Drinks will be provided.

### Raffle Drawing Party & Square Dance

**PRWS Gym, March 28, 5 p.m.**

Come celebrate the annual raffle and all it makes possible for our school. There will be complimentary food, music and dancing.

# WELCOME

This year we have 13 new families (15 new students) joining the school, 8 new siblings of current PRWS families, and 2 returning students—for a total of 25 new and returning students. Below is a list of our new and returning parents, where they are from, the names and grades of their children, and the parents' occupations and interests. I have included a list of new siblings of current or former students as well. Welcome, new families and students—we are happy you are here!

—Hannah Hastings, Enrollment and Outreach Coordinator

### New Families

**Hannah Bigjohn & Nathan Schultz – Viroqua, WI**  
**Nokomis – Kindergarten**

Nathan is a self-employed property investor and enjoys soccer, gardening/yard work, woodworking, and coaching for Driftless United Futbol. Hannah works as a kindergarten teacher at the Kickapoo Valley Forest School, but once upon a time worked at Three Rivers Waldorf School in LaCrosse. Hannah enjoys gardening, hiking, baking, and crafting. Hannah and Nathan have a longtime love of education and the Waldorf philosophy and were drawn to PRWS for the community and safe welcoming space for Niko to explore and become.

**Carissa & Ryan Breen – Deerfield, WI**

**Aidan – Kindergarten/River – Grade 3**  
 Carissa is a homemaker and enjoys knitting, cooking, gardening, playing music, and working with children. Ryan is a project manager and enjoys reading, physical fitness, fishing, and outdoor activities. As a family their shared interests include spiritual rhythms (church), meals, celebrations, outdoor activities, reading, and arts and crafts. Carissa and Ryan were drawn to the Viroqua area because of Pleasant Ridge Waldorf School, the Christian Community Church, and the anthroposophical community.

**Sue Ellen Dubbert & Eric Miller – Madison, WI**  
**Grade 1/Grade 5**

Eric is a Suzuki cello teacher and performing cellist and violist da gamba. He also recently started a piano tuning business. His other interests include film photography and reading. Sue Ellen is a Suzuki piano teacher and performing pianist, avid knitter and reader, and enjoys eurythmy, hiking and learning about herbal medicine. Together their family loves playing music, going camping and hiking, reading books, and building projects in their workshop. When asked what brought them to Viroqua and PRWS they said, "We love the Viroqua community! We have been coming here to be with friends for several years on a regular basis and decided it was time to move here. We wanted our children to live in a small, close community and attend a school that follows the beautiful rhythms laid out in the Waldorf curriculum, have a chance to learn eurythmy and handwork, to develop their minds and souls during childhood free from screens, and so much more."

**Ashley Fish & Brandon Thom – Westby, WI**  
**Zurraeah – Grade 6**

In addition to Zurraeah in grade 6, Ashley and Brandon have Ariella (11th grade at YIHS) and Leum (grade 8 at Westby). Ashley works as an IRIS consultant and Brandon works as a pasteurizer. When asked about hobbies or how the family spends time together Ashley said,

"We are music lovers, and all of us enjoy live music. We attend a lot of shows and festivals."

**Jaqueline Olson & Daniel Heublein – Rochester, MN**

**Riley – Grade 6**

Jaqueline is a nurse whose hobbies include reading, walking, games, and time with family and friends. Daniel is a team account manager for Phillips and enjoys working out, being in nature, connecting with friends, working on projects, and reading. Jaqueline, Daniel and Riley said they love to play games! Card games and board games, as well as toe tag and regular tag. When asked what prompted the move from Rochester, Jaqueline said, "Pleasant Ridge brought us to the area, and we were drawn to Pleasant Ridge first by alumni of the school—the confident and respectful way they presented, as well as their praise of the school. As we learned more about Pleasant Ridge's philosophies and values we wanted the atmosphere, support, and community for Riley."

**Fran & Evan Rehmann – Viroqua, WI**

**Marley – Kindergarten**

Evan is a carpenter and insect enthusiast. Fran is an office manager and outdoor enthusiast. Their shared family pastimes include basement dance parties, arts and crafts, playing outside, and spending time with friends and family in beautiful Viroqua.

**Ivory Rines – Viola, WI**

**Neema – Kindergarten**

Ivory and Neema are originally from Maine, lived in Austin, Texas, and were drawn to the Driftless Region to reconnect with nature and a grounded community. They both love to travel, attend live music, cook, make art, go to the library and spend time with friends. They are looking forward to swimming and going to the farmers markets again this summer! When asked what drew Ivory to Waldorf education she said, "The gentle/imaginative environment of the Waldorf school is very appealing. I also love the focus on nature and storytelling."

**Taylor & John Romens – Santa Fe, NM**

**Oren – Kindergarten**

Taylor is a teacher at Youth Initiative High School and enjoys writing, gardening, basketball, and reading. John works in landscape design/farming and enjoys ecology, agriculture, plants/animals, and perpetually learning about living systems. As a family, Taylor, John and Oren spend their time reading, cooking, gardening, and working outside together. When asked what brought them to Viroqua they said, "We're excited to plant roots in such a vibrant local community where we can be closer to John's family (Dane County), while seeking a deepening of heart and mind in this beautiful place."

**Aune Tsunami (Andrea) & Noah Neisius – Viroqua, WI**

**Althea – Kindergarten**

Andrea works as a chef at the Viroqua Food Co-op and enjoys reading, painting, cooking, film, and outdoor arts. Noah's favorite hobby is skateboarding. As a family they enjoy anything and everything, and love to try new things. When asked what originally brought them to Viroqua Andrea said, "I've often been told that Viroqua was the place for us! After much trial and error on our journey, we gave the glorious town a shot. As if by a miracle, everything slowly fell into step and we have been grateful to call this lovely spot home! I was drawn to PRWS for the freedom in learning through play, sense of whimsy, and overall happiness that comes from the humans that seek education here. We are ecstatic to be a part of the community!"

**Madalyn & Andrew Scott – Boaz, WI**

**Waylon – Kindergarten**

Madalyn does seasonal work on an organic vegetable farm and enjoys being outdoors, gardening, and caring for animals. Andrew works as a truck driver at Cardinal Glass in Spring Green and enjoys hunting and fishing. As a family they like being outdoors and camping. Madalyn said, "We're hoping to move closer or into Viroqua. Everyone is so welcoming and friendly. We enjoy the Waldorf style of learning and are happy with the life-applicable skills Waylon is learning [at PRWS]."

**Megan & David Serleth – Viroqua, WI**

**Adelaide – Kindergarten**

Megan and David moved to Viroqua from La Crosse in 2023. In addition to their new kindergartener, Adelaide, they have Maeve (age 3) and Lilac (baby). Megan is a stay-at-home mother whose hobbies include knitting, crocheting, hiking, and kayaking. David works as a quality assurance technician at Westby Cooperative Creamery, and his hobbies are spending time with family, gaming, and tinkering. As a family they enjoy playing together, spending time outside, and watching movies. Megan and David have always loved the Viroqua area, and after learning about Waldorf education when their eldest was a baby, they were delighted to find out that there was a Waldorf school close by.

**Tatiana (Annah) Sikorsky & Daniel Wiersema – Austin, TX**

**Jack – Grade 4**

Annah is a school design consultant and principal coach. In her free time she loves to read, cook, camp, hike, canoe, work out, listen to all types of music and be with her sweet little family. Dan works as a marketing consultant and is the owner of Old Fashioned Marketing LLC. His hobbies

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*In our efforts to reduce paper use, you may request an electronic copy by emailing [kelly.slentz@pleasantrydwaldorf.org](mailto:kelly.slentz@pleasantrydwaldorf.org).*

*Cover: Painting by Willow Hatfield, Grade 2.*

# SCHOOL NEWS

## WELCOME (cont.)

include reading history, running, and trying new craft beers. Together their family enjoys being outdoors (hiking, canoeing and camping), reading, building with LEGOs, and traveling. When asked what brought them to Viroqua and PRWS, they said, “We grew up in Wisconsin but spent the last 16 years in Texas. We wanted to be closer to our families, to come back closer to the kinds of nature we love, and we’re drawn to the community feeling of Viroqua and PRWS.”

### Lee Turner & Carl Clizer – Utah & Mexico Divari – Grade 1

Lee is a chef, writer, marketing coordinator, and house caretaker who enjoys travel, art, and fun. Carl enjoys sustainable forestry, wood art, and metal working. Together, Lee, Carl and Divari enjoy visiting new places, going to events, music, and parks. Carl came to Viroqua from Utah with his former wife and their children to attend Pleasant Ridge. Lee came later, from Mexico, after living there for twenty years. Carl and Lee knew each other in 8th grade in Washington state and reconnected on social media.

## Returning Students

### Katie and Andrew Anderson – Viroqua, WI Hendrix Anderson – Grade 6

Andrew and Katie have enjoyed the Driftless Region for over 20 years and appreciate the diversity in the landscape and people here. Andrew is an executive partner at Organic Valley and enjoys martial arts and hacky sacking. Katie is a mental health nurse and enjoys travelling, spending time with family and friends, hiking, yoga, and anything food related! As a family they enjoy traveling, eating meals and playing soccer together.

### Emma Hood and Caleb Nicholes – Viroqua, WI Liliana Hood Nicholes – Grade 8

Emma and Caleb have been in Viroqua for about 20 years. Emma works as an infection preventionist at St. Joseph’s Hospital in Hillsboro. Caleb is an owner of Wonderstate Coffee. Their shared family interests include family dinner time, listening to music, and building costumes. In the summer, they love going to Madeline Island.

## New Siblings

**Hugo – Kindergarten**, child of Bruce Brochtrup & Tarah Freymiller  
**Greta – Kindergarten**, child of Celina Dykstra & Jacob Dykstra  
**Tessa – Kindergarten**, child of Lydia & Emlyn Jones  
**Wendell – Grade 1**, child of Ashley & Shawn Neary  
**Alma – Grade 1**, child of Angela Pennington & Adam Pennington  
**Leah – Kindergarten**, child of Angela Pennington & Adam Pennington  
**Elias – Kindergarten**, child of Emily & Raven Stevenson  
**Lumin – Kindergarten**, child of Jessi & Jared Wermager

## PRWS Library: A Brief History & Current News



“I know well that only the rarest kind of best can be good enough for the young.” Those are words of the poet Walter de la Mare, framed and placed upon the wall of Pleasant Ridge Waldorf School’s library by its founding librarian, Barbara von Nostitz Peterson. From its humble beginning in the mid-1980s as a small shelf in the basement of Old Main (the original home of PRWS), the school library has held those words as a guiding light.

In 1995, when the school moved to its present location, a room became available for a reading teacher and a place for parents to meet and sometimes hold “elegant teas” for prospective new families. Out of this group of parents who wanted to see a “real” library become part of the school’s educational work, a Library Committee was formed, and the small shelf of books began to grow. Many things were donated, and fundraising events raised money to buy library supplies and new books. Committee members took turns tending the growing collection, and students began checking out books.

Then in 1999, after 15 years of serving as the school secretary, registrar, and alumni liaison, Barbara Peterson approached the Faculty Council with an offer to become the school librarian. Who knew she also held a master’s degree in library science?! Given permission to take on this new role, Barbara dove in with her usual enthusiasm. She inspired a talented school parent-and-son team to build beautiful maple-wood shelves. She gathered comfortable furniture, a few plants, some

paintings, and of course more books. With the help of the faculty, Barbara arranged the first class visits, where students learned how to use the library. The children loved her.

Around 2001, two volunteers appeared who had years of experience in library work: Janie Tippins, a retired school librarian, and Anne Tedeschi, an artist and professional in book display and repair. Both had grandchildren in the school. They were the first in a series of dedicated volunteers who took care of the library through its growing years. Most had children or grandchildren in the school; all believed the library was an important part of the children’s education. Donations of books poured in and the collection grew and grew. Space on the shelves got tight.

Then COVID hit. Classrooms were set up outdoors, but the library door closed. When indoor classes resumed, Diane Banner and others returned to their volunteer shifts tending the library. But after a few more years it was clear that it needed more attention. That’s when the Faculty Council reached out to ask for help in renewing the library.

Being a recently retired public librarian with grandchildren at PRWS, I was a likely candidate to volunteer. I’d also helped Barbara cull the school’s collection when she became librarian. So I felt a calling and agreed to help. The library was being kept tidy in its overcrowded state, but what was needed next was an overall refresh! The collection of lovingly donated books needed to be lovingly looked over and carefully culled.

Enter a fabulous team of volunteers who love libraries and children! Some have been Waldorf teachers, some are retired or current librarians, and all are familiar with children’s literature. Over this past summer, every book in the library was considered for keeping or passing along. Maureen Karlstad took on the faculty library shelves. Anne-Marie Fryer (who tended the original shelf of books in the basement of Old Main) thinned the children’s nonfiction. It was good for these two former class teachers, with their intimate

knowledge of Waldorf curriculum, to go through those sections. Meanwhile, Roberta Ducharme, Maura Otis, and Diane Banner weeded the fiction. On every shelf, every item was carefully considered—from biography to picture books, beginning readers to chapter books, story collections, novels, encyclopedias, atlases, and dictionaries. When these volunteers were done, I gave everything one last look.

Boxes of books we no longer needed were packed up for future book sales; others were taken to a neighborhood used book store. This involved a lot of lifting and moving, and Gereon Welhouse helped with that. Shelves, furniture, curtains, and rugs were cleaned. Kathleen Kroska was on hand to repair treasured books as needed. Sharon Gerrity took on the card catalog, finding and removing cards of withdrawn books from the cabinet. Liz Bransky helped me navigate the computer software program used to create records of holdings, labels, and processing materials. Mary and Steve Christenson created a longed-for room divider so the reading teacher could have a space of her own. The school’s facility guys, Marc LeMaire and Mike Severson, were invaluable too, assisting in a multitude of situations too numerous to list.

And so, thanks to a summer’s labor of love by many hands, the children have come back to school with a newly refreshed library that has shelf room for lots of new books!

It has been my privilege and pleasure to work alongside this dynamic group of people who believe that a Library is near the Heart of a school community, where “the rarest kind of best” can be found.

—Cele Wolf

## Updated Storage Shed

The Facilities Committee has been busy! With the help of a generous donation from Citizens First Bank, the committee was able to purchase the materials needed to upgrade the storage shed. This team of volunteers replaced the roof and enclosed the section on the back for additional, secure storage.

Storage space is a scarce commodity, and this workhorse of a shed stores everything from snowblowers to Pentathlon gear—all vital equipment to support the day-to-day activities of the school.

Thank you to the following people for sharing their time and skills to help with this improvement project: Mike Severson, Emlyn Jones, Brendan Karlstad, Eamon Karlstad, Marc LeMaire, Joe Lenarz, and Seamus O’Brien.

## Paul E. Stry Supports Teaching in Nature



The Paul E. Stry Foundation, located in La Crosse, Wisconsin, focuses on supporting environmental education programs and facilities as well as efforts that preserve and enhance the natural environment. The foundation has a long history of supporting outdoor education and experiences for Pleasant Ridge students, from visiting the Eagle Bluff Environmental Learning Center in Minnesota to rock climbing at Devil’s Lake State Park. The foundation has also helped create or enhance our outdoor education areas, such as adding native vegetation to the Kindergarten playground and building outdoor classrooms during COVID.

For the 2025–2026 school year, we received a generous grant from the

foundation to put toward field trips that are a critical piece of our experiential science curriculum, including the 3rd grade “Living on Earth” trip to the Joe and Nicole (parents of Evelyn, 6th grade) Tyson’s farm, the 6th grade geology trip to Niagara Cave in Minnesota, and the 8th grade study of hydrodynamics and meteorology at Wildcat Mountain State Park.

This 2025 grant from Stry also supported the 7th grade camping adventure—three days and two nights at Governor Dodge State Park and Bethel Horizons.

Through activities such as rock climbing, students learned firsthand about the geology of the Driftless Region, built a stronger class community, and gained a deeper appreciation for nature.

*Elaine Schmid, 7th grade teacher:* Upon arrival at the state park, the students noticed an incredible rock structure as well as a variety of plant life surrounding or near our campsite. They took care of not only our campsite, but also the spaces surrounding the campsite, following the principle of “leave no trace.” At the end of our trip, on our final hike to a waterfall at the state park, the students were simply in awe of the different environments we passed through: cold springs, rocks, lush moss and ferns in a valley, young growth forests, and prairies. The students learned to better work together through challenges presented during the low ropes and high ropes courses. The goal was to use respect, inclusion, support, and empathy during all activities. The motto of the day was “We all succeed together, or we all fail together.” The team was emphasized, rather than the individual. The group moved through many challenging activities, with setbacks at times, but ultimately succeeding together.

Thank you to the Stry Foundation, our teachers and parents for supporting these opportunities!

# Roots of PRWS—1960s to 1980s

“Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country.” In his inaugural address on January 20, 1961, President John F. Kennedy challenged Americans to embrace civic duty, public service, and sacrifice for the greater good, inspiring a new era of national commitment. The Peace Corps, founded in March that same year, captured the imagination and engagement of many young people who went into the world with a sense of service for the good.

But the 1960s also have a reputation for giving birth to a youth counterculture of protests, sex, drugs, and rock and roll. During the mid-sixties the country experienced the Watts and Detroit riots as well as multiple protests and movements centered on civil rights, women’s rights, free speech, anti-war, anti-draft, and anti-nuclear proliferation, to name a few. The book *Silent Spring*, by Rachel Carson (1962), had been widely read and defined the environmental crisis that was already taking place. All of these concerns affected the youth as they looked out into a world in which trust was broken, authority was questioned, the environment was being threatened, and several charismatic leaders had been assassinated. The aftermath of wars in Vietnam and Central America left many people searching for solutions and for a new path of development—economically, socially, and politically.

Across the country, food cooperatives, alternative health centers, crisis hotlines, and alternative press outlets were springing up. When the *Whole Earth* catalog appeared in 1968, the spirit of creating a new culture and economy was becoming well defined and spreading. The people who jumped on this train were called cultural creatives, back-to-the-landers, organic farmers, and probably some less desirable monikers. There was an idealism mounting to create a better world, which would be achieved partly by educating the next generation. When improving the food system also became a goal for the new society, it brought a sense of wholeness and integration to otherwise disparate movements of social action. The Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) movement was founded then too, along with biodynamic agriculture principles.

People also began to discover the principles of Waldorf education: nature as teacher, human development philosophy, integration of science and the arts, inclusion of the spiritual dimension of life and community, a liberal arts education for global citizens, community collaboration, a healing-focused education. Waldorf schools and teacher education institutes were located predominately on the east and west coasts of the United States until, between 1965 and 1985, Waldorf schools began to sprout up around the interior states. Detroit led the way in 1965 with a commitment to inclusion, cultural renewal, and educational innovation.\*

One such unlikely place, due to its rural location far from population centers, was Viroqua, Wisconsin, where young families who had moved here in the 1970s began to search for an educational model that would resonate with the values they carried regarding cultural renewal and a rural lifestyle. The Chicago Waldorf School had opened in 1973 with one teacher and five kindergarten students, so when parents from the Driftless Region who were exploring different forms of education visited in 1979, they saw a school already in practice. Fortunately, Philothea Bezin, a skillful teacher who had been teaching at the Viroqua Day Care, was inspired by the vision and willing to take Waldorf training to become the lead teacher for Pleasant Ridge. Many other friends wished to support this new cultural impulse and provided gifts of time, expertise, and money. An ethic was developing that urged everyone to bring forward whatever they could, in the certainty that together we could meet the needs of the school and educate the children in front of us. It was important that the school community was a microcosm of our society.

During the ensuing decade, recognizing the need to create economic viability in the region, some farmers worked together cooperatively to create Coulee Region Organic Produce Pool (CROPP), which is now Organic Valley. The co-op’s success was a major factor that helped to sustain Pleasant Ridge’s growth and development. It became an important employer for parents moving to this area, as did Vernon Memorial Healthcare. More people began to relocate here in the mid to late 1980s to join the Pleasant Ridge Waldorf School, bringing skills, starting businesses, and enriching the community. By 2005 the Pleasant Ridge community was further integrated into the broader community through sports, music, and the matriculation of our students to all the area high schools.\*\*

We are grateful for having been able to set down our roots into this beautiful landscape and generous society that was here before us. We are proud PRWS has helped create a new social field and school community that nourishes children with a curriculum in which truth, beauty, and goodness are guiding principles and ideals—an education that faces toward the future.

\*Other schools:  
Cincinnati – 1973; Denver – 1974; Santa Cruz – 1977; Austin – 1980; Ann Arbor – 1980; Minnesota – 1981; Copely, Ohio – 1981; Boulder, Colorado – 1983; Milwaukee – 1984; Minneapolis – 1988. This list is not complete but gives a sense for what was happening in various places without the others even knowing it.

\*\*See the Pleasant Ridge Waldorf YouTube channel for short videos on the school’s history, alumni interviews, and Helle Heckmann lectures.

—Mary Christenson, PRWS Board Member

# HISTORY of PRWS

Reprinted from *Pleasant Ridge Waldorf School LONG-RANGE PLAN, Autumn 2004*

## The First Ten Years—1980 to 1990

Pleasant Ridge Waldorf School was founded in a spirit of commitment to the education of the whole child within a supporting community, a commitment strengthened by the understanding that vital rural communities such as ours are necessary to the health of our society and our earth.

Incorporated as a non-profit corporation in 1979, the founders were split between a vision of a wholly rural campus, somewhere in the heart of the Kickapoo River Valley, and a vision of a campus that was integrated into the life of a small town. Practicality directed them to a former church building in Viroqua, the Vernon County seat, on a border ridge of the Kickapoo watershed. Pleasant Ridge School began on the corner of Washington and Decker Streets. Our beautiful main school building became part of a 3-lot campus with adjacent houses serving as classrooms, office space, and a kindergarten. From the start, the faculty followed the principals of Waldorf education, a worldwide education movement growing from the work of Rudolf Steiner.

The first five years of the school saw a gathering of children. The founding class ((K-1) began with three students in the fall of 1980. These three quickly became seven, and by 1985 Pleasant Ridge had graphed a climbing enrollment of 45 children.

As the faculty grew two things became evident: the need for ongoing Waldorf study and training, and the importance of colleagues working with one another in this extremely challenging task of education. A number of the faculty were the first Pleasant Ridge parents who became inspired to commit their work lives to Waldorf education. The contributions of time, talent, and treasure from friends and parents enabled the work of the school to go forward.

## The Second Ten Years—1990 to 2000

In the 1980’s, the school began to feel constraints from crowding and the Long Range Planning Committee began a search of Viroqua for expansion possibilities. In 1984 the Cricket House, adjacent to our Main Building, was purchased for use as a Kinderhaus. In 1990, the third campus building, next to the Cricket House, was purchased. This building temporarily relieved the crowded conditions, becoming the Kinderhaus and the Office while the Cricket House became the space for the first grade.

Early in 1992 the School Board accepted a report from the Long Range Planning Committee, which indicated that even with the purchase of an additional lot and major new building and renovation, the present campus would not

hold a full eight grade Waldorf school. The board formally focused the facilities investigation on other buildings and building sites, forming a Land Search Committee to handle this specific task.

Classroom space was rented from the United Methodist Church in Viroqua to hold the growing school until suitable property could be secured. The availability of this rented space, which included both classroom space and the use of the sanctuary for some festivals and performances, allowed Pleasant Ridge to continue to grow.

In 1995, with 119 children enrolled in grades K-6, the school had truly outgrown the Decker Street campus and the classroom space available for rent in the United Methodist Church.

In February of 1995 the Viroqua School Board accepted our offer to purchase the 1952 Viroqua Elementary facility. This building and playground has met most of our facility needs as we continue to work toward our goal of providing a K-8 Waldorf education. In the fall of 1995 we began the first steps in developing the asphalt playground into beautiful green space. In 1997 we graduated our first 8th grade class. As the school grew, so did our program offerings. Faculty was added as the classes in handwork and vocal music that had been informally done by volunteers became a formal part of the curriculum. We added a eurythmist to the faculty who was also able to provide curative eurythmy. We began to develop a remedial program to work with the growing number of children who needed extra help.

As the school grew and costs continued to increase, the board looked for ways to bring in revenue to the school without overtaxing the parent body. After many discussions, the pledge process was born—a way for parents to be more involved in the financial life of the school and to be able to make realistic financial commitments. The board, the faculty, and a representative parent group also looked into the possibility of becoming a charter school within the local Viroqua Area Schools, but decided against applying.

In the fall of 2000, Pleasant Ridge celebrated its 20th anniversary with a renewed commitment to independent Waldorf education. We continue to develop programs that will lead us along the path to a full Waldorf education while at the same time researching ways to make this education affordable to all parents who wish to enroll their children and creating an environment that will sustain the school community for many years to come.



# ANNUAL REPORT

The 2024–2025 school year was rich and full! We welcomed several new staff members as well as old friends starting in new positions, including Mandy Palen and Susana Ruder as Lead Kindergarten Teachers, and Sarah Rowe, Annah Brown, Sabina Myszka, and Cheyanne Nash as Kindergarten Assistant Teachers. Joe Ellerbusch and AnnaJo Doerr joined as our Movement teachers. Elsa Macauley brought back a Therapeutic Eurythmy program as part of our Integrated Student Support. Mike Severson joined our custodial team and Kim Anderson joined our admin team as Marketing & Events Coordinator. And we were very excited to have the previous year’s 8th grade teacher, Carrie Treviranus, return to restart the journey with the class of 2032!

Ten new families joined the school, along with four new siblings of current or former students, and one returning student. Sixteen former kindergarteners walked over the Rainbow Bridge at our opening day assembly to establish themselves as our new 1st grade class.

We celebrated all our lovely festivals. All classes contributed to the Michaelmas assembly and feast, and the younger grades sang to each other across the Sidie Hollow lake during the Martinmas Lantern Walk. Many costumed children were enchanted by the “Winnie the Pooh and Friends in the Hundred Acre Wood” enactment on Halloween. There were many more memorable moments during our wonderful winter traditions: the Advent Spiral, Santa Lucia, and the Festival of Lights. We are thankful that many community members celebrated with us during the joyous and festive Holiday Faire.

In January and February, eight Korean students visited our classes and helped us hold a Lunar New Year celebration during the coldest time of the year. At the start of May, every student danced around the maypole on May Day. Two weeks later, staff and students gathered to cheer, applaud, and high-five the 5th graders as they ran down the hallway, sending them off to the Pentathlon. And at the end of May, 16 rising 2nd graders walked 14 graduating 8th graders, the class of 2025, over the Rainbow Bridge.

We are so thankful for our teachers, staff, and supportive community who continue to work together to fulfill our mission of nurturing students to become confident, compassionate, and capable young adults. As we celebrate our 45th anniversary, we look forward to many more decades of carrying out this mission!

## 2024–2025 Contributions Breakdown

**Total Unrestricted Donations: \$54,741**

**Total Restricted Donations/Grants: \$19,065**

- Number of financial gifts: 73
  - Range: \$20 to \$15,000
  - Average donation: \$996
- Biggest groups of financial donors (not mutually exclusive):
  - Alumni parents: 32%
  - Grandparents: 25%
  - Alumni grandparents: 19%

—Kelly Slentz, Development Director

## Your gifts of time and money in 2024-2025 helped us to:

- Educate 147 remarkable young people in our school.
- Offer some amount of tuition adjustment to 21% percent of our families.
- Increase subject teachers’ base salary by 16% and class teacher base salary by 9% (which also brought subject teachers’ base salary to parity with class teachers).
- Build a new Grade 1 playground structure.
- Expand our Integrated Student Support to include Therapeutic Eurythmy.
- Continue to offer students and staff an organic hot lunch program four days per week.
- Carry out field trips and projects focused on environmental education.
- Complete the drainage project at Old Main Building to prevent further flooding.

## Reflections from the Treasurer

Wow! The 2025–2026 school year marks the 45th anniversary of Pleasant Ridge Waldorf School and our fifth year participating in the Wisconsin school choice voucher program. Looking back at our 35th anniversary annual report, I was struck by how much rings true today:

- Reflecting on growth since our humble and earnest beginnings
- Our rich, diverse, and evolving curriculum
- The interconnectedness of our community
- Alumni involvement as parents, teachers, staff, and volunteers
- Our commitment to being a widely accessible school
- An 8th grade teacher moving to take the incoming 1st grade (Mr. Schmidt then, Mrs. Hotchkiss now)
- Ongoing facilities upgrades and projects
- Long-range planning efforts

Looking at the 2024–2025 year specifically, both revenue and expenses have grown significantly since 2013–2014—representing approximately 4% compound annual growth. Notably, the ratio of income and expenses as a percentage of the total has remained largely consistent. For instance, wages have stayed between 75% and 80% of total expenses each year, demonstrating our enduring commitment to fairly compensating our faculty and staff.

While the 2024–2025 year resulted in a \$64,000 deficit, it represents a relatively small percentage of total revenue, and there had been more than sufficient surpluses for multiple years prior to absorb the cost. The outlook for 2025–2026 is a balanced budget with similar total revenue and expenses to 2024–2025.

### Recent Financial Milestones

The school has achieved several significant financial milestones:

- Growing endowment fund surpassed our goal threshold of \$300,000
- Increased salaries and wages to support competitive compensation
- Expanded staffing to support classroom instruction, administration, and fundraising efforts
- Established a 401(k) program for employees

### The Wisconsin Parental Choice Program Impact

Beyond the COVID years, the biggest single financial development has been our participation in the Wisconsin Parental Choice Program. WPCP enrollment at PRWS increased significantly over the first three years and has now stabilized as we enter year five.

The program has helped PRWS expand access to the wider community beyond what may have been possible before. It has led to steadier enrollment and revenue, and has supported the evolution of the school into its next stage

of development. Part of this evolution stems from the complexities of the program, which involves various rules and regulations that have required or necessitated increased staff, costs, and more formalized policies and procedures.

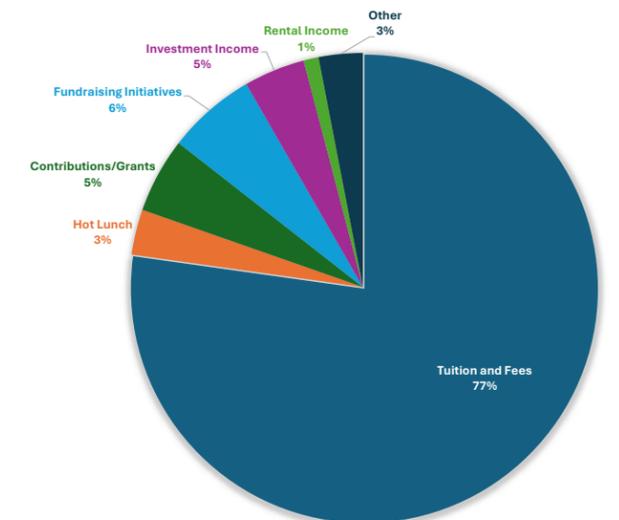
Overall, the benefits of the program have been worth the unavoidable challenges. It is part of the new fabric we are weaving with our wider community—one that can be fuller, deeper, and richer as a result of everyone’s participation in the process.

### In Summary

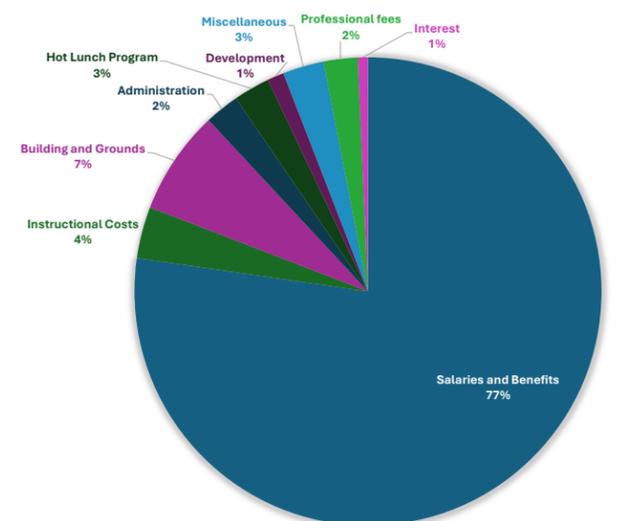
There is much to be grateful for and marvel at. PRWS has come a long way in many aspects. And at the same time, PRWS remains the same school and community in so many other ways—true to the vision and values that have guided us for 45 years.

—Chris Thomas, PRWS Board Treasurer

### 2024-2025 Revenue of \$1,408,858



### 2024-2025 Expenses of \$1,474,066



## Donor Spotlight: Margret Lenarz & David Levin



### How did you first connect with Pleasant Ridge? What drew you to the school?

We came from Minneapolis. David's dad is an anthropologist and had done work with a Waldorf school out in Los Angeles. We all visited City of Lakes Waldorf School while David's parents were visiting us. Our oldest, Peter, went to City of Lakes for kindergarten and we did some early childhood classes with Frances there.

Margret's brother Joe and his wife Janna also had their children at City of Lakes, but they moved to Viroqua for Pleasant Ridge. They intentionally chose this community. We visited several times and eventually decided it made sense for us to move down and raise our family here. We moved in 2010.

### Did your children attend Pleasant Ridge?

Yes! Peter Levin graduated in 2019 with Betty Link's class and is now a junior at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst in the architecture program. Frances Levin graduated in 2023 with Mandy Palen and is currently a junior at Youth Initiative High School.

### What are your favorite memories?

*David:* Festivals, assemblies, plays, and the Rainbow Bridge ceremony! I really enjoyed the Festival of Lights and Michaelmas with the chimes. I really loved May Day too, with the choosing of the royalty by chickens! Every year, the 8th grade presentations had a big effect on me—just seeing how the kids have come into themselves and are able to stand in front of all of us and present themselves. That's when you saw in a practical and tangible way what this education did for them. It has been consistent over the years, a predictable outcome of the kids being here—so comfortable in their own skin.

*Margret:* Martinmas, but it was always so cold! The first and last day assemblies with the Rainbow Bridge ceremony were so powerful. It is such a great recognition of the transition from home to the bigger community, and then from 8th grade to moving on to high school. It really feels like a community-supported rite of passage.

### How were you involved with the school?

We both did a lot of volunteer work. Margret was Class Parent (now known as Class Caretaker) for several years in both the kids' classes. Margret was also one of the chairs for the Holiday Faire for several years. She hosted wonderful crafting parties to make items for the Faire!. She also worked in the kitchen and as the 4H liaison to submit entries to the county fair.

David served on the Board of Directors. He was the go-to AV (audiovisual) guy for all the assemblies and events. He created and hosted the podcast. He helped with the website, created the Parent Portal, and uploaded photos.

### How has PRWS impacted your children and family?

It was the center of our social life for many years. We met people through the school and developed lasting friendships.

For the kids, they have a solid sense of themselves. They are comfortable and confident in who they are. The school provided structure and support for them to do that, with the rhythms of the day, focusing on where they were as individuals, and meeting them where they were developmentally.

*David:* It's notable how comfortable they are interacting with adults. Peter talks about reaching out to professors to ask questions, whereas peers don't have that same impulse. His transition to college was effortless. In college, he had his first graded test and it was a non-event. He's doing great and loving it. PRWS was the foundation for that, and it was reinforced by Youth Initiative High School.

*Margret:* The education at Pleasant Ridge supports students in being curious about the world around them and gets them excited about learning. We appreciate the integration of art and creativity and are constantly blown away by our kids' creative work, and how joyfully they approach it. David and I are both creative but never had that encouragement as children, and now we see how it is enriching our children's lives. Frances's love of learning has translated into a love of high school, and all of the opportunities that that presents, both in and out of the classroom. Peter was drawn to study architecture with an underlying eye for design, His education at PRWS and Youth Initiative set him up well for that—a lovely combination of arts, science, and math.

### What do you appreciate most about PRWS?

We appreciate how, through arts-based and creativity-based education, PRWS lets students fully establish their intuition. We also appreciate the social inclusion of the class, and the focus on developing relationships—with the teacher and with each other.

### How are you involved with the school today?

We support the school through a recurring monthly donation and we still enjoy attending the Holiday Faire. We were parents at PRWS for 13 years and are now actively engaged at YIHS.

### What hopes do you have for the school going forward?

*Margret:* My hopes are the same as back then: that it becomes more integrated with the greater Viroqua community. It seems we are further apart than when we started, due to the political landscape. I would like to see more of a bridge.

*David:* Back when Monika Sutherland was a music teacher, there was one performance that combined Viroqua and PRWS at the public school gym. That was a really neat way to make a connection.

### Why do you choose to support PRWS financially?

It feels important to us! It has always been a part of the school culture to contribute. Every kid should have the opportunity to have this education. It's our positive impact on our little corner of the world!

### Why do you think it's important for the whole community to support PRWS?

We are super lucky to have such a vibrant community in such a small town—the arts, the food.... It's such a great place to live and raise children. PRWS has had a big impact by drawing in a lot of the folks that contribute to that vibrancy, not just on a community level, the interests and the fun things to do, but also financially. Your typical small town like this is dying, but Viroqua is thriving. PRWS is a big part of that. PRWS families tend to be engaged people. They are here because they want to be part of a specific kind of community. Many alumni have come back to raise their kids after going out into the world. This is a sign of the sustainable value Pleasant Ridge education and community represent.

—Kelly Slentz, Development Director



# DEVELOPMENT

## Development Message

The PRWS board, faculty, and families are deeply grateful for the support of our community that keeps our school thriving year to year.

### Development Goals for the 2025–2026 School Year

The Development Office has a goal of contributing \$123,500 of net income to the school's bottom line for the 2025–2026 school year. The majority of this income will go into the Operating Budget, bridging the gap between tuition income and the actual cost of this beautiful education.

Development raises funds through the Parent Fundraising Commitment/Annual Raffle, private donations, the Holiday Faire, the School Store, the Kwik Trip Card program, and the Business Directory. With your support, we hope to raise \$55,000 through unrestricted donations. Thus far, we are about 38% of the way to that donation goal (as of December 15, 2025). Please consider helping us meet our goal!

### 2025–2026 Annual Raffle

We are excited to be in raffle season once again! Tickets are available through PRWS student families or at the PRWS office. The theme this year is Nourish, Restore and Renew! The Raffle Committee has put together three exciting prizes:

**FIRST PRIZE:** Win a deep freezer (9 cubic ft), 1 whole lamb (processed & frozen), 1 quarter cow (processed & frozen), a year's supply of gelato (24 pints), and two lovely lambskins. *Value: \$2,600 | Cash alternative: \$1,000*

**SECOND PRIZE:** Win a package of gift certificates to restore body and mind: Sound Healing with Aligned in Light, LLC; Bodywork by Sarah Dvorsak; Watershed Chiropractic & Wellness; Reiki with Oily Temple & Healing Arts LLC; Viroqua Athletic Club 6-Month Family Pass; Woolly Bear Taphouse Gift Card. *Value: \$1,500 | Cash alternative: \$500*

**THIRD PRIZE:** Enjoy a getaway with a two-day, two-night stay at a stylish guesthouse in the countryside just minutes from Viroqua, with a woodstove and claw-foot tub, a weekend of a Soulful Sauna delivered to your door, and a delicious meal at Driftless Cafe (\$100 gift certificate). *Value: \$1,000 | Cash alternative: \$250*

Please join us at the drawing party on March 28, 5 p.m., at the school gym. There will be complimentary food, live music, and square dancing!

—Kelly Slentz, Development Director

## DONORS

Many thanks to all who have supported the work of our school August 1 2025 - December 11, 2025.

Anonymous  
Orlan & Denise Bakkum  
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Ben Agar and Julee Caspers Agar  
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Bonnie Wideman  
Loma Huh  
Tree Loving Care  
Turkey Ridge Organic Apple Orchard

**2025-2026  
PRWS RAFFLE**

**3 GREAT PRIZES**

**Winners Selected  
March 28, 2026**



Visit us online at  
[pleasantridgewaldorf.org](http://pleasantridgewaldorf.org)

  
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CALYX