

ROOTS

THE POST OAK SCHOOL MAGAZINE

Celebrating 60 years





The Post Oak School Magazine is published annually for current families, grandparents, alumni and their families, and friends.

Please send change of address and all other correspondence to The Post Oak School, 4600 Bissonnet St., Bellaire, TX, 77401 or email info@postoakschool.org.

Our Mission

The Post Oak School is a diverse and welcoming Montessori community that honors and guides lifelong learners as they create their own bold pathways in leading purposeful lives.

The Magazine, *Roots*, is produced in-house by the Development and Communications Office at Post Oak.

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Special Note

P after a name indicates a person is a Post Oak parent and indicates their child's graduation year.

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The
POST OAK
SCHOOL

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Cover photo: A history of The Post Oak School in photos (see page 13)

Left: Students at the Museum District Campus participate in a Holi celebration

Welcome to the second issue of *Roots*,
the magazine of The Post Oak School.

Post Oak students and their families belong to a group of individuals who come together on their learning journeys for the good of others. Dive into their stories, and if you have one to share about your time at Post Oak or your child's experience, we'd love to hear it. Please email us at development@postoakschool.org.

—The Post Oak School Development & Communications Team

Post Oak *Shines*

by Maura Joyce, P '20, Head of School

The Oxford English dictionary defines a “diamond jubilee” as the celebration of the sixtieth anniversary of a notable event or foundation of an organization.

As 2023 brought Post Oak into its 60th year, we continue to shine bright like a diamond in Houston. Like all of the Post Oak students who have graced the school's halls over the years, diamonds show their brilliance in the light and are admired with awe by those who gaze upon them. In poetry, prose, and scientific writing about this gemstone, there are many, many more adjectives used to describe the diamond. Reflecting on the school Post Oak has become since 1963, more than a handful of these words are fitting.

**Like a diamond,
Post Oak is rare.**

From its founding, the Montessori roots of Post Oak were strong and

they have anchored the school in its purpose and mission. There are many Montessori schools in the country and across the globe that can say the same, but Post Oak never capped its developmental growth. There are few schools in the country that begin with students at 14 months and continue through the end of high school. It is rare to find a school with a program that spans 17 years and rarer still to find one that keeps the integrity of their Montessori program at the top. The International Baccalaureate diploma program complements our students' work at the 11th and 12th grades, but the Montessori elements remain dominant—self-directed, hands-on, independent work within a collaborative and compassionate community.



**Diamonds are
precious, as is the
community that is
Post Oak.**

From the beginning Post Oak has existed to take on a very honored task. First and foremost Post Oak is a community of people focused on the most precious gift of all: children. We open our doors each day, entrusted with the care of other people's children and we have always taken that seriously. Students begin here as such tiny beings and complete their journey as a young adult. Each step along the way they require such care and

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respect to be allowed to become who they are meant to be. Empathy and compassion is modeled and practiced daily and at every developmental level. It allows us to celebrate each other while we witness these precious moments of development and growth: putting shoes and socks on all by themselves, learning to read, drawing a self-portrait, writing their name, discovering the formula for area, singing a solo in the musical, taking their first trip away from home, landing their first internship, winning the volleyball game, presenting their challenge project, or getting into their college of choice.

Diamonds can be used to cut metals because they are strong, as is Post Oak.

The school has stood the test of time. Reaching this 60th anniversary included a few bumps along the way. Even in the face of adversity, Post Oak has not only endured but it has grown and has come out stronger on the other side. In six decades the school has faced floods from storms and hurricanes, capital investment in a building that had to be abandoned due to environmental difficulties, major debt in the early years and, most recently, the Covid-19 pandemic. Post Oak alums consistently share the same benefit of their Post Oak education—independence, confidence, collaboration, problem-solving skills, no matter what year they attended Post Oak, no matter what the crisis du jour was. The foundation of who we are

and the purpose of our school has not changed in 60 years. This grounds us and keeps us strong, especially when we need to adjust and be flexible when a challenge presents itself.

Diamonds are valuable and grow more valuable with time, as does a Post Oak education.

If my job as head of a private school could be translated into sales, I sell a product, the benefits of which may not be seen for years. That is because measuring the value of an education is not simple. Unlike a diamond, the seeds that are planted during the learning process at Post Oak are not all visible on the surface. But like a diamond, the value grows year after year, as each of those lessons gets applied in different situations and in different ways. Our students are free to follow their interests, which turn into passions, and eventually their own bold pathway. The many seeds that were planted during their time at Post Oak manifest themselves and push them forward, increasing in value well after they leave.

Diamonds are radiant—Post Oak students shine.

The story of Post Oak is told in the sparkle you see in the eyes of its students. The most important part of

our job the past 60 years has been to instill that love of learning. Creating an environment where students want to learn, where they can be curious, where their ideas matter, where the answers are not given but are to be discovered, where exploration, failures, reiterations, and repetition is celebrated. Post Oak students want to come to school because it is where they thrive and where learning is fun. Life-long learning is something we hear over and over again from our alums. They leave Post Oak and are engaged with the world—in college, in careers, in society, as global citizens. Wherever they go Post oak students today and over the past 60 years SHINE.

Lastly, I will point out that diamonds are also incredibly hard to make, needing the seismic forces of the earth and thousands of years to turn black carbon into the brilliant, crystalline gemstone. It did not take thousands of years to make Post Oak what it is today, but we got here through the seismic determination, creativity, hard work, and vision of the many leaders, teachers, parents, and students that came before. Take a walk through our history in the pages of this magazine and you will see the long and winding path of our wonderful school. The precious gemstone that is Post Oak will continue to shine well beyond the next 60 years. ✨

Creating Our Strategic Plan

by Alison Wong, P '28 & '30, Board of Trustees, Alumna

In the six years since I had the great fortune of joining the Post Oak School Board of Trustees, our community has weathered many storms together—some literal (Hurricane Harvey) and some figurative.

Our society is experiencing seismic shifts on several fronts: the pace of technological progress has increased exponentially over time; we are seeing rapid changes in the social, political, economic, and environmental landscape locally and globally; we are becoming more knowledgeable about the human condition, including the importance of mental health and well-being.

Needless to say, this confluence of factors has presented many opportunities for self-reflection—as an institution.

As the stewards of the school's mission, the board of trustees has taken this

opportunity to think about our recent experiences and look to the future.

Over the last two years, as we emerged from the pandemic and into the new normal, the board has been engaged in a comprehensive strategic planning process that began with a refresh of our mission statement and culminated in a set of priorities, objectives, and implementation plans that reflect the school's mission and vision—our strategic plan.

Our mission and strategic plan comprise a shared vision—they represent who we are and also who we want to be. Because these things represent our entire community, the



process of refreshing the mission and developing this plan has been intensive and inclusive. We drew from class discussions, student and faculty retreats, surveys, focus groups, and the results of our most recent interim report, completed as part of the ISAS re-accreditation cycle. Trustees, faculty, staff, and administration were directly involved in the drafting of these plans, but so were students, parents, and alumni.

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The Strategic Planning Process

In a rapidly changing world, it stands to reason that the nature of strategic planning is changing as well. The planning process thus reflects the school itself and the particular moment in the history of any school. We now recognize that strategic planning is an iterative and ongoing process, not simply a once-every-five-years stand-alone task.¹

In our planning process, we emphasize the language of “compasses over maps”—the idea that a strategic plan should choose a clear direction without attempting to anticipate a detailed sequence of action steps over several years. With this framework, schools can more nimbly adjust their tactics to respond to a changing landscape while still heading in a direction that serves their missions and values.²

The Plan

The following commitments we are making to our community and to each other will shape Post Oak’s future and strengthen its foundations:

Engaged + Inspired Community

We will lean into *our different*. We value our community’s mission and will strive together to bring it to life. The Post Oak School is the preeminent Montessori program in the City of Houston, and yet it sometimes also feels like one of Houston’s best-kept secrets. We

will communicate who we are as a community and what sets us apart and we will expand and energize our community by cultivating inclusion and belonging; we will support and strengthen our enrollment and retention.

Bold Student Experience

We will provide a student experience that leads to bold pathways. First and foremost, we will embrace, examine, grow, and evolve in our Montessori practice. We will also strengthen and expand resources for students to thrive, follow their passions, and find their purpose.

Talent

We will be the employer of choice for best-in-class employees among private schools in Houston. To do that, we will provide competitive compensation and benefits in order to attract and retain highly qualified employees; we will create an environment where employees belong and can bring their full selves to work and be inspired to perform at their best, investing in relevant opportunities for growth and career development.

The Prepared Campus Environment

We will create a comprehensive campus development plan that reflects the optimal Montessori environment, driven by programming goals and considering the needs and goals of the entire Post Oak community.

The Well-Funded School

We will fund strategic initiatives while stabilizing tuition and costs and we will increase our endowment to support programming needs of the future.

This is our plan for the next several years—a period long enough to establish a vision, but short enough to implement and measure our progress. It is a plan that assumes a continual process of re-examination and renewal, and also one that will require, reinforce, and ground us all in our core values of collaboration, curiosity, and peace.

As the outgoing board chair, I am proud of the work we have done to this point and am thrilled to pass the baton to our incoming board chair, Whitney Walsh. Whitney has been a trustee for the past five years, chairing the development committee and serving on the strategic planning committee. Prior to her board service, she co-chaired the Post Oak Parents Association (POPA), as well as the Biennial Gala and has spearheaded countless development projects. (Read Whitney’s article on Philanthropy on page 56.) I know I speak for Whitney and the entire board when I say we look forward to accomplishing this strategic plan with you. 🍷

[1] Kaufman, Nanci. “How Boards Can Rethink Strategic Planning and Stay Agile in Times of Change.” Independent School. Spring 2020.

[2] Bamford, Greg, and Crystal Land. “Control Alt Delete.” Independent School. Winter 2023.

60 Years! ■

Since its founding, The Post Oak School has grown and evolved just as have the children entrusted to its care. From its humble beginnings of three students to its current status as a nationally recognized premier Montessori school, Post Oak has a storied history that reflects the passion, dedication, and hard work of countless individuals who have contributed to its success.

The chronicle below includes writings from former parent Christianne Melanson, former Head of School John Long, and Elaine Schweizer, Senior Communications Specialist.

The Beginning

It was 1961—Carol Ferguson had just started a new pre-school in order to have a special environment for her own and other children. It was exciting and exhausting at the same time. It takes a lot of effort to put a school together and get it off the ground, but in less than two years she would do it all again. At that time, The Little Red Schoolhouse at 2318 Briar Ridge Drive was not a Montessori school. That's because Carol didn't yet know who Maria Montessori was, nor what her teaching method meant. But soon she would know—in fact, one Ms. Juliana van Olphen, when she saw the school, convinced Carol, “This

has to be a Montessori school.” Only Carol was unsure she could change the philosophical underpinnings of a school that easily—not with students in place and a parent body who expected “pre-school as usual.”

The answer was The Little Schoolhouse. It opened in 1963 with four classes: three “traditional” pre-school classes that paid the bills and a single Montessori class from which she planned to grow a dedicated Montessori school. That class started with just three students and one certified teacher, but with determination and energy, soon there were five; and then there were more.

Early Teachers and Training

In the summer of 1963, Nan Hanrat arrived from the Netherlands, dispatched by Mario and Ada Montessori (Dr. Maria Montessori's son and daughter-in-law) to train teachers “in house” for the new school. Connie Wallace was already there with Carol and Lydia Englesmith. Lydia's daughter, Suzele, and Effie Parsons arrived later and joined the training. Marie Staub was the only fully trained teacher, but when the work became overly daunting, Pia Pieperkomp came to help out.

A Dominican sister called Sister Edna Ann Hebert, who had been attending a training program in Washington DC, started working at The Little Schoolhouse. Mario Montessori himself came to observe her work. When she returned to Washington in the fall of 1965 to complete her classroom training, Carol Turner came to substitute for a number of weeks, starting a relationship with the school that would blossom again in the 1990s. Sister Edna Ann then returned to Houston for the remainder of that year.

The early years were difficult. Association Montessori Internationale (AMI) was founded by Dr. Montessori



The Little School House

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TIMELINE OF POST OAK'S 60 YEARS

60s

1963 Carol Ferguson opens the Little School House as a Montessori school on Briar Ridge Drive with one Primary classroom

70s

1970 First Young Children's program is established

1972 First Lower Elementary classroom is established

1973 Creative arts program is introduced

1975 First Upper Elementary classroom is established

1978 Middle School is established

80s

1981 The school moves to a facility on Harwin Drive and is renamed "The Post Oak System"

1981 The first 8th grade class celebrates their graduation

1984 The school moves to the vacant Gordon Elementary building while Bissonnet Campus (BC) is under construction

1984 Infant/Young Children's Community is established

1985 The school is renamed "The Post Oak School" upon opening of the BC

1988 The Board names Suzanne Pugin head of school

90s

1990 After School Enrichment Program (ASEP) begins

1994 First computer system is put into operation

1995 The Board names John Long head of school

1996 The school begins working toward ISAS accreditation

1999 A major capital campaign allows for new gym, library, and art studio facilities to open. A time capsule is buried in the flooring of the hallway to the gym to be opened in 2063 on the school's 100th birthday.

00s

2001 Tropical Storm Allison hits, necessitating renovations due to flooding

2006 The school achieves ISAS accreditation

2007 Fourth Lower Elementary classroom is established

10s

2010 Third Upper Elementary classroom is established

2011 The school begins its BIGWork capital campaign

2012 The High School is established in the Museum District in a renovated, open-concept building

2014 Post Oak becomes an International Baccalaureate (IB) World School, offering the IB Diploma program for grades 11 and 12

2016 Renovations begin at the Bissonnet Campus

2016 The school celebrates its first class of High School graduates

2016 The Board names Maura Joyce head of school

2017 Hurricane Harvey hits, requiring more renovations to the BC

2017 New High School building constructed; Middle School moves from the BC to the existing Museum District Campus building, completing the adolescent campus

20s

2020 Global pandemic forces shutdown of cities, causing schools to implement distance learning

2020 A new tinker building is constructed at the MDC, as well as the "South Annex" featuring a sports pavilion and more classroom space. The area between existing buildings is turfed

2021 Property is purchased in the Museum District on Banks Street in anticipation of future campus expansion

2022 The BC backfield is turfed for flood mitigation and increased usage due to the pandemic; a new pavilion is erected over the outdoor basketball court

2023 The school celebrates its 60th anniversary at the fall Family Fun Day on November 4, 2023, at the Bissonnet Campus. See you there!

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herself, and instruction was not easy to come by, especially in Texas, as most training courses were on the east or west coasts. The school was growing rapidly, and some teachers left to start their own schools soon after their training was completed. Sister Edna Ann, for example, was getting her training so that she could start the Dominican Montessori School, now known as St. Catherine's. Carol Turner started the Palmer Montessori School, now known as St. Stephen's Episcopal School.

Gradually over the next several years qualified teachers were found who stayed, some of them for over 20 years. 1970 saw the arrival of three new teachers—Mary Louise “Ouij” Almond, who was to be a mainstay of the school for nearly 15 years, BR Simon, who would return at least twice more, and Tweed Courtney. They oversaw a huge class of two- to seven-year-old students; but the age range was beginning to be felt. So in 1971, Ouij carved off the “under threes” into a separate class, and Sue Mathews (Weller) arrived to take the six- to twelve-year-olds for Lower Elementary. Meanwhile, Gwyn Ferguson started CAP—the afternoon Creative Arts Project—which in many ways was a precursor to the current After-School Enrichment Program (ASEP). Ouij would work with these young children for 14 years, also acting as Carol's “right hand” administrative assistant.

Early Growth

The number of students continued to increase rapidly, which meant that facilities needed to be expanded. The first solution was to install a double-wide trailer at the back of the property for the older students. The house



1981—Middle School visits the White House

next door was acquired in 1973, and also saw the arrival of Judith Bailey, who stayed on for 20 years. Another 20-year veteran of the school arrived in 1976—Susan Wallen joined the Lower Elementary program. And Betsy Marchione (Johns) joined the faculty to take the now separate Upper Elementary class. Her two sons, Stephen and Daniel, came with her and would eventually be part of the first and second 8th-grade graduating classes.

Middle School Begins

Just two years later, the “older boys”—a group of six boys that included Stephen Marchione, Todd Martin, John Hazen Jr., and Peter Lowery, plus a larger number of younger classmates, became the nexus of the first Middle School class. One of their first activities was to decamp to Mexico for six weeks, where they participated in cottage industries among their other studies. They also took a trip to New Mexico, which started a long tradition of on-the-road education that continues to this day.

School Evolution

In the summer of 1978, AMI had an International Congress in Amsterdam.

Many of the Little Schoolhouse faculty and staff attended, including Carol and her mother, Marjorie Spaulding. These congresses, held in different locations around the world each year, provide a wonderful opportunity for teachers to meet and work with AMI educators from around the globe. The congress in 1996 was held in Seattle, and again a number of Post Oak faculty attended, including Patty Clarke, Terry Crews, Johnnie Denton, Barbara Hacker, Mirani Smith, and Susan Tracy.

The increasing age of the oldest students led some to think that “The Little Schoolhouse” was no longer an appropriate name for the school; it didn't acknowledge the breadth of the program. At the suggestion of Kay Sharp, a member of the Board of Trustees and an interested student of native Texas trees, the name “Post Oak” was used for the first time. At this time, the school changed its legal name to Post Oak Montessori.

The growing numbers of students made it clear that a new building was needed, and in 1980 the school moved into a brand new, beautiful facility on Harwin Drive. That same summer, a Montessori teacher training

school was set up to train teachers at the Primary (three- to six-years-old) level. The director of training at the Texas Montessori Institute was Virginia “Ginger” Buckley, and among her students over the next few years were Gail Norris, Ellen Garvin, Susan Valentiner, and Debbie Nickerson, all of whom subsequently taught at the school.

The move impacted the school’s financial resources and caused it to lose several older students. So in late 1980, Post Oak Montessori merged with Follo, a special needs educational facility that had been founded by Mrs. Jack Trotter. The name was changed to The Post Oak System, to reflect its dual program nature, though the association lasted only a few years.

1981 marked a big year for the school—the very first 8th grade graduating class. The class of six, all males, included Stephen Marchione, who went on to become a master guitar builder of considerable renown. There was no ceremony to award diplomas; the boys and their families marked the occasion with a dinner at a nice restaurant. Before the class of 1982 reached their diploma ceremony,

they had one of the more interesting Middle School trips to Washington D.C.—it included an introduction to then vice president George H. W. Bush, complete with photo op.

Also in 1983, Lupe Lopez arrived at the school. As a classroom assistant she saw more children come through the school than any teacher until her passing in 2018. Several “generations” of students were lifted by her smile and assisted by her cheerful disposition.

A school depends on the efforts of far more than faculty and administration, and tribute must be paid to the behind-the-scenes effort of many people on whom the school depended for reliable and conscientious service. The Post Oak School has been blessed with a number of these people, not the least of whom is Manuel Mejia, current maintenance director, who arrived in 1985, and who 39 years later is as reliable as he was when he first arrived. He was joined in 1989 by Darwin Matusek, whose labors, including woodworking and Montessori furniture making, resulted in so much use and value to the school until his retirement in 2010.

Birth of the Bissonnet Campus

The site of the beautiful new building at 11230 Harwin Drive was unfortunately plagued with environmental difficulties from an industrial plant nearby, however, and had to be abandoned in 1984. Moving again temporarily into the Maud W. Gordon school facility at Bissonnet and Avenue B, (which was rented from HISD) the school began its second building program in five years—a program that led in 1986 to the current building in Bellaire. Each move cost the school close to half of its students, students that took years to replace, from the early childhood classes up. It was at that time that Carol departed from the school after 21 years. Carol moved to New Braunfels, where she began a new chapter of Montessori teacher training in Central Texas.

For a year the school was directed by Patty Thompson, but because she was not a certified AMI educator, Judi Bodi (Orion) assumed the role of curriculum director. While waiting to take up their new location at 4600 Bissonnet Street, the school made one more name change—The Post Oak School.

The building had been designed by Carol Ferguson prior to her departure, with input from Mario Montessori, and it represented a true Montessori school—designed for the Montessori approach from the ground up. During the winter break at the end of 1985, the school moved into the new building. On the first day of classes long lines of children walked across Bissonnet Street carrying their class materials into their new classrooms, ready to start building their community in this new space.



1999 Groundbreaking ceremony for Bissonnet Campus improvements

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By the following September in 1986, a second Lower Elementary opened up. In 1987, after just 18 months as head of school, Fluornoy Manzo departed at mid-year. A parent, Laura Murray, took a leave of absence from her law firm to accept the post of interim head of school while a search committee looked for an AMI-certified administrator.

Community Building

In 1989, Post Oak's parent association, POPA, launched the first of a series of fall picnics at a lovely riverside location, with fishing and swimming, lots of games on the lawns, and a shared dessert table. A long, sloping hill provided the possibility for the kids to roll and slide down towards the river while their parents and teachers enjoyed an unhurried opportunity to get to know each other.

Already by this time many traditional events had been established—Halloween Carnivals, Early People Day, Grandparents Day, and Watermelon Day. The upper grades had been growing, and in 1988 were so large that the sixth graders were moved into the Middle School to balance the numbers more evenly.

Head of School Suzanne Pugin arrived in the summer of 1989. 1990 saw the return of BR Simon to The Post Oak School for two years, making the fifth Primary class. Larry Quade also arrived for his first year teaching in the Middle School. By 1994, the school had firmly established six Primary and three Lower Elementary classes, pushing into an exploding population in the Upper Elementary.

All of these new classes needed more space, and in 1993 the first major



Year unknown—a student opera performance

addition was made to the school—two classrooms, one above the other on the east side, extending the upstairs and closing off direct access between the courtyard and the dismissal area.

With rapid growth sometimes comes disruption, and the school suffered some setbacks in 1994, including the loss of Suzanne Pugin early in the following year. Susan Wallen and Bill Zajic shared administrative responsibilities until an interim head of school, Virginia Penn-Benson, was found. Virginia held the school on a steady path as the search committee combed the world to find an experienced AMI administrator with extensive Upper School experience. They found John Long in Cleveland, and John and his wife Kathy arrived in the summer of 1995.

The school's athletics program also took off in 1995 with the addition of Coach Mark Tucker, who designed the physical fitness and athletics programs and defined what it meant to be a Bearkat athlete. In 2012, when giving out the school's first Bearkat Heart Award at the athletic banquet, Mark stated, "This award

stands for dedication—being at all the practices and games; persistence—to keep working hard at improving yourself; attitude—being a leader through actions and staying positive; willingness—to challenge yourself, to stretch your limits." Mark was a strong, calm, and dedicated presence for his students and his coworkers throughout his tenure, until he left in 2017 due to cancer. After his passing in 2020, the Bearkat Heart Award was renamed the Coach Mark Tucker Heart Award in his honor.

By 1996 the Upper Elementary was once again bursting at the seams, after having returned to a single class in 1994. In 1998 the class was split again, this time for good.

Growing Again

During the previous eight years, the school had grown both in number of students (with a general size of 350 students as a goal) and in physical plant. In 1999, through the school's first capital campaign, ground was broken for the largest addition since the current building was built, which included a gym, art room, two Upper Elementary classrooms, offices and a

rainy day space for younger children to play when weather kept them indoors. A time capsule was buried in the flooring of the hallway to the new gym as construction proceeded, to be opened in 2063 on the school's 100th birthday. The new facility was ready when school started in August of 2000, and a wonderful addition it has been.

On Friday, June 8, 2001, the nine graduating eighth graders made their speeches, received their diplomas, and went to a party. By the time they departed from the ceremony, water from tropical storm Allison was beginning to build in the streets. All night, as Allison circled overhead, the



water rose. Early on Saturday morning, business director Jim Barr arrived to discover the school had taken between four to six inches of rain throughout the building. By 10:00 a.m., at least 25 volunteers had arrived to start the process of cleaning out the water, attempting to save as many of the materials and books as possible, and pulling out rugs, upholstered furniture, office records, and computers. By evening, professional salvage people were on hand, installing giant blowers and sealing the space in order to dehumidify the air as rapidly as possible. The clean-up, restoration, and repair took most of the summer, with thousands of hours logged by professionals, staff, and volunteers alike. Summer programs had to be canceled, but school started only one week late.

Fall of 2001 brought a return to the restored space, but almost before anyone was into their school year routine it was September 11. While no one directly connected to the school lost their life that day, no community could remain unaffected by a national tragedy on such a scale. The response of the children included a memorial

brick structure initially displayed at the Día de los Muertos commemoration, and later erected around the base of the flagpole. The Middle School held a fundraiser car wash for orphans of the day. In 2003 the Middle School dedicated a peace garden to the school, and on September 11, 2003, the garden was re-dedicated in memory of the victims of 2001.

Reflecting on these turbulent events, in 2002, visionary board members Pat Mitchell and Melanie Gray sought to ensure the financial health of the school. They championed the establishment of an endowment, and the two families added the seed money to get it started. Equally important were the policies put in place to help it grow.

Traditions Abound

Classroom assistants are a large part of what makes Montessori education possible, and without their loving effort the school would not be what it is today. Alma Armendariz, Lupe Lopez, Teresa Onofre, Shelley Rodriguez, and other classroom assistants enriched the cultural awareness of the school with their introduction and development of the annual Cinco de Mayo celebration and performances. The first performance in 1991 was one of the biggest events of the year. This celebration encompassed every child from four-and-a-half years and older, and resulted in one of the largest turnouts of parents, not only as observers, but as helpers both before and during the big event. From the very first year, it was obvious that the multi-purpose room could not hold this event, which moved to an outside tent by the basketball court, to Faith Lutheran church, the Scottish Rite Temple, and later to Episcopal High School's auditorium.

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This page, top: Year unknown. Middle School students at community service
Bottom: 2003—Let's go, Bearcats!

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Along the way, Cinco de Mayo was the initial vehicle for the then-annual auction of class projects, which were originally all quilts, but eventually blossomed into a wide array of classmade projects and donated products and services. It was also the original venue for an annual dinner for all Post Oak families. As all things evolve, in 2001 the school began a new tradition of biennial galas, including a more formal dinner with dancing and silent and live auctions. Cinco returned to a performance only, and after the pandemic moved from the gym to the classrooms and outdoor sports pavilion. Meanwhile, the biennial Gala has continued to be the grandest of parties, while also raising funds for the school.

Other traditions have also contributed to the richness of the experience at The Post Oak School. From the earliest years of the Upper Elementary, science fairs were often an annual event geared to inspire students to seek out an area of interest, explore it in depth, and then present it to the entire school community. The crowds were often so large around the exhibits (spread over a large portion of the school) that movement was nearly impossible. And the din was considerable, as students explained their work and demonstrated their results.

One other early tradition dating back at least until the 1970s, which has undergone several permutations over time, was Mud and Water Day. In its earliest incarnation, a load of dirt was delivered to the school, and then wet down with hoses to make a huge amount of mud. The children played in the mud to their heart's desires until, in the end, they were



*Top: 2009—Students practice their Cinco de Mayo performance
Middle: 2015—Upper Elementary Science Fair in the BC gym*

soaked through and covered in mud cakes. At the end of the day, they were hosed off for the return home. It is not recorded if the parents traditionally threw their clothes away after this particular exercise! Over the years this changed to Sand and Water Day, using a delivery of sand, which may have been somewhat time consuming to get out of everything (including the cars!), but which probably left fewer stains on the clothes. This then changed to Watermelon Day, which involved swim suits and water hoses, sprinklers and wading pools, and loads of watermelon to be consumed. Most recently only

the water sprinklers are left, resulting in summer school Splash Days.

From 1987 to 2001 annual Halloween carnivals provided a fun, safe, and supportive event for the children. Money earned supported a variety of school projects, such as playground and other needed equipment. Having a community day focused on the children with games, food, and fun for everyone helped create a greater sense of involvement, and helped welcome those new families who join the school each fall as well as friends from the local community. This event evolved

into Field Day, then Family Fun Day—a free fun-filled day of games, food, and great times paid for by the raffling of classroom mystery boxes.

From 1991 onwards, the annual Book Fair has provided an opportunity for families to acquire good books for themselves and their children, as well as contribute an ever increasing array of books to the classrooms and the library. It has also served as a platform



for family dinners, (sometimes with mariachi bands), poetry reading, art as illustration, bookmark construction, storytelling, student band performances, and story-book reading, which has involved hundreds of families over the years.

For over 30 years, The Post Oak School has been inviting alumni to return in January for Alumni Night (now Alumni Voices) to talk to current and prospective parents and students about “life after Post Oak.” They answer questions about academic and social preparation for college and life. The evening is always interesting, and also acts to reassure parents who were not themselves educated in a Montessori school that this very different methodology does, in fact, prepare students very well for the challenges that lie ahead.

Working towards the Museum District Campus

What did the ideal Post Oak School look like? That question was at the crux of school improvement efforts

in the early 2000s. The school had begun to offer a series of classes for prospective parents as part of the enrollment process. Retention rates for rising Elementary students were at all-time highs, and upper school numbers were growing. Because of this enrollment demand, the school had opened new Lower Elementary and Upper Elementary classes.

During the same time period, the school completed the rigorous accreditation process of the Independent Schools Association of the Southwest (ISAS). Twenty separate committees comprised of faculty, administration, trustees, and parents examined every aspect of the school’s operations and produced a self-study that was an honest assessment of strengths and weaknesses. Once ISAS accepted the self-study, the association dispatched an evaluation team to visit Post Oak. The team’s report praised the school for “visible fidelity to its mission,” and unequivocally recommended Post Oak for accreditation. The report included both commendations for the school’s strengths and recommendations for improvement.

The self-study, the ISAS report, and enrollment growth gave faculty, administration, and the Board of Trustees a full agenda. The Board entered the 2009–2010 school year with strategic planning on the table, anticipating the need to expand facilities in order to accommodate enrollment growth and enable new program initiatives, such as a music studio.

In the fall of 2009, the Board began to work with consultant John Littleford to develop the school’s next five-year



Top: 2011—Primary children enjoy watermelon on a summer splash day
Bottom: 2019—Alumni Voices event

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strategic plan. Planning included consulting with employees, parents, and alumni. From these meetings, the Board was surprised to hear how much support there was among families for a high school at Post Oak. They were committed to Post Oak's approach and regretted having to leave after Middle School. In fact, several referred to comments they heard at Alumni Voices from college students who said Montessori was a better preparation for college than high school was, especially in terms of balancing freedom and responsibility, self-management, and pursuit of personal interests.

Under Chair Bob Harvey, the Board took the question seriously, appointing trustee Stuart Dow to head a committee to explore the issues. Dow, who was the founding head of Houston's Emery/Weiner School, and Post Oak trustee Windi Grimes accompanied John Long on a trip to Cleveland to observe firsthand the Montessori High School in action. They returned not only excited by the character and quality of the program, but intrigued by the possibility of creating a comparable school in Houston.

The committee set to work crafting a vision statement for Post Oak's High School, one modeled on the Cleveland school. The potential high school would be located in the Houston Museum District in order to promote partnerships between students and experts from area museums, universities, and medical center institutions. The school would also become home to Houston's fifth International Baccalaureate Program (IB).



2012—The first High School class gathers for a photo on the first day of school at the newly remodeled Museum District Campus building

To assess the practical details of the high school initiative, the committee moved in several directions. It continued to investigate other Montessori high schools. It contacted nationally-known private schools that have multiple campuses to learn from their experiences. And it formed a financial sub-committee to develop a multi-year, pro-forma, business plan to predict the costs of such a venture.

Finally, and critically, the board wished to explore in greater depth parent interest in Post Oak High School. After interviewing several market research firms, it invited John Littleford to return. Over a two day period, Littleford met with 65 parents in small groups, and Stuart Dow met with 18 more. Despite some on-going questions regarding certain particulars (such as size, sports, etc.), Littleford's conclusion was that there is strong parent support for this initiative, enough for the high school to succeed—if the board and administration are ready, willing, and able to do the required work.

On May 11, 2010, the board convened a special meeting to evaluate all of

the information it had gathered and decided to pursue the Post Oak High School—and at the same time to address the needs of the Bissonnet Campus. To learn more about the High School history, read the first issue of *Roots Magazine* featuring a ten-year retrospective of the Museum District Campus.

Recent Milestones and Memories

Not long after the successful launch and honoring of the first High School graduating class, it was time to celebrate John and Kathy Long's retirement from Post Oak. The Board had conducted a search to find our next head of school, welcoming Maura Joyce in the summer of 2016. Her extensive Montessori experience made her a favorite to carry on the school's AMI heritage. Maura's first desk that summer at Post Oak was a temporary one in a Primary classroom, as the Bissonnet Campus administrative hallway, music room, and second floor were undergoing improvements. With fresh bright colors and a spacious, light-filled reception area, the renovations were completed just in time for the 2016–2017 school year. In addition to the administrative hallway

getting a layout improvement, the upstairs was remodeled into two Upper Elementary classrooms and a teacher workroom, and a dedicated Music Room was created for classes and performances. The open-air hallway around the Peace Circle was also enclosed and air-conditioned, making walking through to the gym a much more pleasant experience year round. (For the most recent improvements to the Bissonnet Campus, read last year's issue of *Roots Magazine*.)

The Bissonnet Campus would soon face the same watery fate as many other Houstonians in August of 2017 in the aftermath of Hurricane Harvey. The school once again took on several inches of water at its Bellaire location, while the Museum District Campus was spared. The community rallied around the school and many of its families, who were also hit hard by the storm. Service days were planned and many hands came together to help both Post Oak families and our school, as well as the larger Houston community. Classroom space was generously offered next door by Episcopal High School for Elementary classrooms, and the gym

housed what was possibly the largest Primary classroom in the US, while still managing to be a place of peace, concentration, and joyful activity.


A few years of relative peace would pass before the start of the Covid-19 pandemic. Post Oak, like all other schools across the nation, moved to distance learning for the end of the 2019–2020 school year. Beginning the 2020–2021 school year took careful planning in order to open with a hybrid format for families to choose between in-person or at-home learning. The 2021–2022 school year allowed our community to return fully in person. Unwavering gratitude goes out for the work of Maura, the Board and Medical Advisory Team, and all families and employees. It was not easy—new skills and perseverance were needed by everyone. On this side of it, our community remains strong and has enjoyed slowly coming together in many of the ways we enjoyed before the pandemic.

Looking Ahead

Speaking at the school's Jubilee in the fall of 2013, then-Board Chair Lloyd Kirchner reflected on the school's then 50-year history:

So where will we be, and where will this school be, fifty years from now? It is up to us to decide that. We can either let life happen to us and to The Post Oak School, or we can make it happen, taking advantage of opportunities and creating strong, creative plans for the future. All of us are a part of it—every parent who brings their child to school each day, every child who learns something new and goes home excited about it, every teacher who sees each day as a new day and is creative in lesson presentations as well as in her responses to each and every child, every administrator who helps provide the structure and resources that support the magic that happens in the classroom, every donor who writes a check, every board member who struggles over things like the strategic plan and the budget, every person who digs deep to support our capital campaign for The Post Oak School. We are all committed to providing an educational experience that will prepare our children to be citizens of the world, who will be ready, willing, and able to embrace opportunities and address challenges.

It is an exciting thing to build a school, and that is what we are doing. We are building The Post Oak School for the next half century.

Those words continue to be true, and so our work continues. 

To learn more about the Board's next five-year strategic plan for The Post Oak School, see Board Chair Alison Wong's article on page 4.



2019—The east commons of the newly constructed High School building



Montessori & Mindfulness

by Beth Reese, PhD, E-RYT, RCYT, P '18, '20, & '25, Faculty

A few weeks into the 2022 fall semester, Miles, a Primary student, was preparing for bedtime.

Like many of our children, he was not ready to go to sleep—or at least the energy in his body was still high. He “flip-flopped around like a squirming fish,” shared his mom, Meredith. Perhaps as a parent, you, too, have experienced something like this. When



Left: Middle School students bond and stretch together

Top: Beth and a Young Children's Community class start with simple poses

mom calmly suggested it was time to relax, Miles seemed to instinctively know what to do.

Miles closed his eyes and began to “pick” imaginary flowers. Bringing his invisible bouquet to his nose, he breathed in deeply, pretending to smell the flowers, and let out a long sigh while lowering his hand back down to the bed. In a matter of minutes, Miles's body became more calm, and he dozed off to sleep.

Let's unpack what Miles did, and maybe you can try it on your own. Flower Power Breath is an age-appropriate breath (most of your kids know this one, and my 23-year-old daughter still does it!) designed to lower stress and energy levels. First, for most people, imagining a flower is a pleasant experience. And even if it isn't, the thoughts have now shifted from, in Miles's case, going to sleep to thinking about a flower. Pretending to smell a flower may stimulate the hippocampus, or “memory lane,” of the brain, so now Miles may even

be thinking of a pleasant memory. Breathing in deeply through the nose and breathing out slowly with a sigh stimulates the vagus nerve, which tells the body it's okay to calm down. Doing Flower Power Breath probably took less than a minute and is a mindfulness tool that can be used to self-regulate. Self-regulation is the ability to notice our emotions, energy levels, behaviors, and other physiological needs and take action—such as Flower Power Breath—to shift our state if we decide we need to shift.

Research shows that mindfulness education starting with toddlers has benefits, including increased initiative, self-control, and social-emotional skills.

It was also important that his mom, who participates in her own mindfulness and yoga practices, was able to co-regulate with Miles by providing literal and metaphorical space for calmness. Co-regulation is the ability to manage emotions,

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behaviors, and energy levels with the support of another connective person—and it can be beneficial for people of all ages to be that grounded person and have one in your life. Emily Hansen, a lead teacher in our Young Children's Community (YCC) for ages 14 months through three years, advises that “a young person can not yet regulate their nervous system independently (even for adults this can be hard), but requires co-regulation from a supportive caregiver in challenging situations. The state of [the co-regulating adult's] nervous system will either help or hinder the child's process of regulation. Mindfulness and yoga provide the opportunity to practice self-calming and regulating activities.” As we get older and our brain and body develop, we can grow in our capacity to self-regulate and self-control; this does not necessarily happen on its own, and mindfulness education at all levels helps scaffold the building of these critical life skills.

Flower Power Breath, simple movement sequences, awareness of body sensations, and practices—such as hand tracing and the Rainbow Game—are self-and co-regulation life skills taught through a mindfulness education program at The Post Oak School. MOSST (Mindfulness and OHMazing Strategies for Students and Teachers) mindfulness and yoga curriculum was first introduced to the entire community, YCC through High School, in the spring of 2020—just in time for the pandemic (and me showing up in your living rooms for over a year). The lessons are taught often in weekly 20-minute segments to youth in YCC, Primary (ages 2.5–6+), and Lower Elementary (grades 1–3),



This page: Miles and his sister use the MOSST A-Z Yoga Cards to decide the order of their poses and breaths to create a mindfulness practice

in large and small groups for Upper Elementary (grades 4–6), and through small groups and eight- to 16-week optional yoga sessions for secondary students. There is also a 16+ week on-demand curriculum with daily two- to 10-minute lessons available for each level. In addition to research-based mindfulness and movement practices, MOSST integrates mindfulness with neuroscience and transformative social-emotional learning experiences.

As we get older and our brain and body develop, we can grow in our capacity to self-regulate and self-control; this does not necessarily happen on its own, and mindfulness education at all levels helps scaffold the building of these critical life skills.

The foundational mission of MOSST is to support students and teachers in learning to Feel, Connect, and Act to Heal: *feel* body sensations that arise, *connect* that sensation with an emotion or need—such as hunger, thirst, anger, joy—and then *act to heal* by choosing a mindfulness tool or other solution that enables co- and self-regulation, such as what Miles and his mom were able to do.

Down the halls of the Bissonnet Campus, students in YCC, Primary, Lower, and Upper Elementary learn weekly mindfulness lessons through whole class and small group experiences. For example, one week we might discuss that stress is a normal and natural human experience and that not all stress is bad. During this session we practice a sequence of movements that may remind some of you of a sun salutation while listening to a bilingual song with positive lyrics, “I am OHMazing, I am OHMazing; Yo soy OHMazing, Yo soy OHMazing...” When we complete the sequence, students are invited to place their

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hands on their chests and be curious, kind, and present about what body sensations they feel and even hear. Answers include “my heart is beating faster,” “I feel warmer,” “my breath is faster,” and “I can hear my breath.” We then briefly discuss how these are responses to stress and that we induced them by exercising. And sometimes our body may also have these same sensations as a result of certain emotions, such as excitement, anger, frustration, and sadness. “I wonder what we could do to calm down our bodies?” I ask. Some students move their bodies to the ground to do calming, grounding movements, like child’s pose; some students will practice Flower Power Breath; and some students will cross their arms to hug themselves in a Shanti (peace) Hug to send some calming pressure to their nervous systems.

In the scenario above, students have learned to Feel, Connect, and Act to Heal in a “low stakes,” lighthearted environment where they have space to

experiment and practice. Low stakes, daily practice (similar to preventative practices like brushing our teeth) creates habits that students will be able to implement automatically in more high stakes situations like arguments with friends, anxiety over testing, or challenges to their self-esteem. (Hint: practicing at home and as a family can make a big difference in cultivating mindful habits.)

Montessori and mindfulness education are a natural pairing for many reasons, including the attention to building curiosity, kindness, compassion, focus, self-control, independence, connection, and unity.

From a neurobiology perspective, this process of Feel, Connect, and Act to Heal is related to the ability to become aware of and manage our own

interoception and neuroception. These are critical for building self-regulation and self-control. Interoception is the way we understand input from our nervous system about what’s happening inside the body, including feeling hungry, thirsty, or satiated, as well as noticing when the body is having a stress response such as heart racing or contraction in the gut, chest, or throat. Neuroception is the nervous system’s subconscious control mechanism that constantly surveys our environment for safety or danger. All humans benefit from learning and practicing skills that help us with awareness and positive action, and a person who struggles with noticing and managing interoception and neuroception independently will need additional support. Some learners may experience sensations differently, and may have more challenges in connecting to and expressing internal body sensations.

Montessori and mindfulness education are a natural pairing for many reasons, including the attention to building curiosity, kindness, compassion, focus, self-control, independence, connection, and unity. Hansen shares that “unity provides the person with understanding of themselves and of the world. Yoga and mindfulness practice invite us to be present in the moment and fully present in our bodies.” Research shows that mindfulness education starting with toddlers has benefits, including increased initiative, self-control, and social-emotional skills (Bazzano et al, 2023; Holt et al, 2022). For ages six through adult, peer-reviewed studies of mindfulness education demonstrate meaningful results such as increasing executive functioning, kindness, self-control,



Above: Beth and a group of Lower Elementary children work with yoga materials.

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managing stress and anxiety, and self-esteem, while also decreasing stress, anxiety, and even suicidal ideation in teens (Bae, 2019; Crowley et al; 2018; Hanson & Hanson, 2018; Hayden et al, 2019; Shetty et al, 2020; Wu et al, 2023).

Down Bissonnet Street at the Museum District Campus, which houses faculty and students in grades 7 through 12, the MOSST mindfulness practices look slightly different, but they share the same foundational principle of Feel, Connect, and Act to Heal. Because the prefrontal cortex of our brain does not fully develop until age 25, adolescents are often more impulsive and willing to take risks, and they often need high levels of social connection and interaction, as well as love and acceptance (Siegel, 2013). Adolescents also have increased levels of hormones, a need to feel connection and belonging, and stress from responsibilities and experiences, including at school, home, and in the world (Siegel, 2013). There is also



This page: Lower Elementary students going out on a walking meditation.

a growing body of research that the pandemic created an increase in stress and anxiety for many teens (Aini et al, 2021; Kudinov et al, 2022; Kush et al, 2022; Lane et al, 2022; Pedrini et al, 2022; Pustake et al, 2022).

In the Secondary MOSST program, students practice tools like walking meditation, loving-kindness

meditation, partner and group poses, and visualization. Act to Heal expands to include relationship-building skills, critical thinking skills, and community support. One mindfulness practice that people of all ages—including adolescents—find easy-to-use almost anytime and anywhere is the Rainbow Game, a great game for interrupting

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GET TO KNOW BETH

Beth Reese, PhD, E-RYT, RCYT, is the proud Mommabear of three kids: Jordan '18, Cole '20, and Max '25. Beth has worked as the mindfulness, yoga, and mental health support instructor for The Post Oak School since 2020, and was the yoga teacher for the first High School class in 2012. Beth has advanced trainings in yoga and mindfulness, and a PhD in art museum education. She has experience teaching art, art education, art museum education, yoga, and mindfulness in public and private schools, in museums and universities, and also to adults in various community settings. As the founder of Yogiños: Yoga for Youth®, Beth is the co-creator of an adult training program and on-demand curriculum, MOSST, for schools. In addition to working at Post Oak and Spring ISD, Beth is working on a master's degree in clinical mental health and interned part-time as a therapist at Resilience Play Therapy and Counseling in Katy last summer and Ethos Behavioral Health in the 23–24 school year. ☘

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anxious rumination and/or for anchoring oneself when things feel overwhelming. It can be played in two ways: look around for each color of the rainbow in the present moment and current environment, or imagine a favorite place and then find each color there. With the Rainbow Game and other MOSST tools, students learn that when they have feelings of anxiety or overwhelm, they don't have to mask or stuff them, but that they can create a little space between themselves and their feelings so that they can seek support or problem solve. Indeed, they can Feel, Connect, and Act to Heal.

Speaking of Act to Heal and an increase in executive functioning and self-control, shortly after Meredith watched Miles self-regulate, she found that both of her kids, including Kate, a Lower Elementary student, started coming home taking deep breaths and teaching her ways to calm down. Some days they take out the MOSST A–Z Yoga Cards and create sequences of poses, breaths, and mindfulness

practices to manage stress and anxiety. Meredith shared that “at one point my son turned to me and said, ‘I need three deep breaths, and then I’ll be ready to help with the dishes.’ I was both stunned and thrilled knowing that kind of self-regulation was available to children.” ☘

Author’s note: I would like to thank *you*, the reader, for your time and energy with reading this work. I also thank Miles, Kate, Meredith and Zach Smith for their willingness to practice these skills, as well as to be included in this article. As always, I thank my trusted and long-time editors, Meredith Blanks Paterson and Jordan Barger '18, for their insight and practice of this work.

■ For more information about integrating mindfulness, movement, and yoga into your daily life, you can contact Beth at bethreese@postoakschool.com, and for a free week of any level of MOSST, see school.yoginos.com.



This page: High School students meditate during a short term intensive course known as January Term or J-Term.



Wilderness Trips Offer Expansive Benefits

by David Roddy, High School Faculty

“Eeeww,” students respond when they learn that a bucket is the answer to nature’s call or that showers are a matter of inventiveness.

The uninitiated to wilderness travel are often curious about such otherwise mundane aspects of life, but we are preparing to live in nature as we might normally at home—brushing teeth, cleaning faces, arranging beds.



Students across cultures yearn for recess, where monkey bars or an empty field beckons. In the UK, after WWII, adventure playgrounds sprung up, where children and adolescents were free to build wooden structures, tear them down, create, and recreate as a way to teach growth, leadership, and malleability of mind and spirit. For the lucky among us, our own childhoods consisted of free hours outdoors where adventure reigned. Growing up among skyscrapers or in the orderly suburbs of Houston doesn’t regularly offer exposure to open adventure play, where boundaries are discovered instead of dictated. There, however, in the Big Bend, lies a sweeping desert wilderness, cut by a ribbon of blue-green—the Rio Grande, or Rio Bravo as our neighbors to the south refer to it—into a series of deep canyons through this terrain of rock, sand, and sky.

Our adventure begins near the entrance to the fourth and final major canyon as the river curls northeast. It is named Boquillas Canyon for the tiny mouth-like holes in the vertical limestone at the entrance of the canyon. This will be our playground.

Having packed our gear and met our guides during our stay at the camp headquarters the night before, we now unload our canoes and supplies at the river’s edge in a hurried but orderly state. We enjoy some ham and turkey sandwiches, and after a quick introductory lesson on how to manipulate our paddles, we pair up, ease our boats into the murky water, and settle amongst the gear bags onto metal benches.

We paddle. At times we paddle hard against the wind in no forward current,

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but often enough we slip and slide, twisting through faster water, lightly and without penalty. Occasionally, a rapid pushes hard to the outside of a sharp bend, where thick Nile River Cane, alien and invasive to the river, waits to trap or flip a canoe. Over the next four days we will continue to wander down this natural water course.

Sliding down a river is a particular feeling. You see life at water's level: horses, cows, birds, insects, foxes, all come down to the river for life's nourishment.

Humanity mixes here, too, on the river left and right and sometimes in, enjoying hot springs, cool water, and the beauty of the landscape. People

from the small town of Boquillas, a short walk up a dusty road to the river right, rest themselves on both banks of the rivers, ready to sell us bracelets, metal figures exquisitely shaped into scorpions and dragonflies, and carved sticks. After one canoe flips in the cane and subjects a pair of us to cold water and humility, we are offered warm tamales and sun on the Mexican bank. Does it really matter that we have just crossed into Mexico? We hardly notice any more than does the fox or the hawk. We are in wilderness.

On the second day, we enter the shaded confines of the canyon. Two-thousand vertical feet of what is known as the Dead Horse Mountains rise immediately to the left, while five thousand feet of limestone quickly rise to a heady total of eight thousand

feet on the Mexico side in the Sierra Madera del Carmen, an extension of the same mountains, known by different names. For the next two nights we camp on the right side of the river in verdant tiny fields shared with a gentleman and his horses and cows.

This particular shared water comes from Mexico. The Rio Grande tributary that begins in Colorado to the north is a trickle by the time it leaves El Paso, having been drained for pecan orchards and rows of green chiles in New Mexico, and drawn repeatedly through faucets in Albuquerque and the shared communities of El Paso and Juarez. But, thanks to strong summer and early fall rains that feed the Sierra Madre Oriental to the south in Mexico, the

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Rio Conchos, a tributary every bit the Rio Grande's equal in volume and length, merges with the Rio Grande from the north to give new life to the river. Springs near and within Boquillas Canyon add to this flow, and we are buoyant, both in spirit and canoe.

Each day, we shove off around ten in the morning and stop for camp by three. In those precious hours before

dinner, we play. Students pound rocks together to see what happens, checking for cleavage and fracture points or trying to make tools. Others do a few brisk sets of jumping jacks before running, diving, and falling into the water to swim to the other side. When the opportunity comes to hike together up a narrow slot canyon, students rejoice. Soon, feet, hands, and sound waves bounce off the walls and floor, as adventurers bound into the canyon, climbing rocks, scooting up ledges, jumping over small clefts.

This is pure joy. It is what we have come here to do, to re-create ourselves in nature.

Discovery and play isn't anything assigned, no more than is setting up a tent, packing gear, or looking out for one another on the water. It is all necessary, fun, and immediate. It is what students will comment on later in seminar, that the beauty of the trip is that one lives in the present, that the daily worries are unfurling a sleeping bag or navigating the next rapid. The same kind of joy is shared around the campfire after a hard-earned and student-prepared meal. We sing, trade stories and joke, laugh, and watch others. "Can you feel it?!" one student asks the others, "Don't you feel better out here?!" Others agree, and nobody says anything about cell phones.

On the last morning we pull the canoes up the sandy bank that students were leaping over in turns the evening before, and we load the trailers again to begin the journey back to base camp and eventually home to Houston. The city of Houston hits abruptly with its multitude of lights and signs and skyscrapers, blotting out the stars. The river and its canyon walls stay with us, though. The group has bonded on and by the water; we all have shared an experience together that is ours. We are better for it too. The starry skies of the Chihuahuan Desert rest in our shared memories and will be there if we choose to return next J-Term, or in some future opportunity that we carve out for ourselves.

"What could we change or improve next time?" the group is asked. "Have more time on the river," comes the response. Nothing about a bucket or a bath is mentioned. ☺



Focus on High School Internships

Post Oak students have the incredible opportunity to undertake internships with local institutions to pursue their interests, learn new skills, and gain valuable experience. Our school's network includes Houston's renowned museums, the Texas Medical Center, and nearby universities and institutions. These internships offer real-world experiences—whether it's conducting research, working alongside professionals, or immersing themselves in hands-on projects, Post Oak students apply their studies in practical and meaningful ways. Below are a handful from the 22–23 school year, with thanks to High School internship coordinators Shonali Agrawal P '31 and Comer Wadzeck. 🐾

Khadijah A. '25 interned at the HCA Medical Center shadowing one doctor in the course of her normal routine tasks. This involved observing note taking, patient checkups (with the patient's consent), discussing different terms, procedures, and strategies, etc., with the doctor.



Khadijah

"I really liked going along during checkups with different patients. Most rewarding was getting to brighten up hospital patients' days, even if it was just for a few hours."

Kilali L. '23 worked as a teacher's assistant in a Rice University MBA course. "I helped my supervisor create slides for his class presentations. We met once every two weeks to discuss a new topic and what slides I would need to create. I sat in on the class and joined group projects. This internship helped me learn more about crypto and finance and how the world is changing in those areas. I learned what a college class



Kilali

experience will be like, which will help me get acclimated quickly to college environments. I also improved my written communication and researching skills."

Talulah M. '24 was the coach of a 4–5th grade Odyssey of the Mind team from Clemente Martinez Elementary, which won first place in their regional competition. Her responsibilities included helping raise funds for their trip to Dallas for the state competition, meeting every week, guiding them through the



Talulah

creation of an eight-minute long skit, and helping with all homemade props, challenges, and homework. "This has been the most impactful experience of my life, and has helped me put my social situation into perspective. It not only changes the lives of these kids, but also changes your life. I loved connecting with these kids, and being a positive role model. I feel like I made a big impact in their lives, and hopefully have given them resources to become successful."

Alexander M.'s 25 interned with the Printing Museum. "My job was to make videos for them explaining some exhibits that they have, and



Alexander

giving a brief history and context to the pieces. I made six of these videos, one every two weeks, and they covered a wide variety of time periods and issues. I chose to intern at the Printing Museum because of my interest in history, so it was

(continued on next page)

great researching the papers and finding out their historical meanings. I learned all about newspapers from the American Revolutionary War to the American Civil War and how they impacted the information the public received at the time.”

Veronica P. '26 “I love my internship at the Bellaire Nature Center for various reasons, but the main reason is just being able to work up-close with various animal species. Since I was a child, it was always my dream to get to actually handle and feed animals. So, getting this experience preparing their food, cleaning their



Veronica

cages, and much more was such an exciting opportunity—the little kid in me would be squealing with joy. They have some animals there like opossums, pigeons, snakes, turtles, and more. It is great and I’ve been learning so much that I didn’t know before.”

Ashley R. '24 interned in Post Oak’s Upper Elementary. “For the first few weeks, I observed the class to get a basic understanding of what a Montessori classroom looks like for children this age. This helped me come up with ideas and fostered an understanding of the way the classroom functions, which was helpful going forward. Once I had



Ashley

gotten more familiar with the class and the kids, I started working more hands-on. I helped kids understand how to use technology like Google Workspace products, helped with math problems, helped with writing paragraphs, and led them in science experiments. The most successful (in my eyes) of the experiments that I did was one where we built simple circuits.”

Mateo S. '24 “Over the course of my one-year internship at the Greentown Labs startup incubator, I got to experience the management side of a startup incubator as well as get to speak to many startup founders and learn about their processes and technological developments.



Mateo

I spent most of my time working with Salesforce and other customer management platforms and got

first hand experience helping to manage Greentown’s user records. Additionally, I spent a lot of time helping develop a program to help communicate between their two user databases.”

Gia S. '23 interned at Washington Heights Veterinary Clinic. “I had a great time working alongside former Post Oak parent, Amy Garrou. While there, I observed multiple surgeries, took dogs on walks, and assisted at the front desk. It was such an amazing experience getting to know and work alongside professional veterinarians, and meeting so many cute animals was a great perk! I learned so



Gia

much about the day-to-day life of a veterinarian, and will always be thankful to have experienced this internship.”

Yazzie S. '24 interned at Aurora Picture Show, transferring old website data to a new website, sorting files, helping prepare for events and screenings, and working as a translator between the organization and a French artist. “I really enjoyed getting to know the staff. They were all incredibly warm, welcoming, and helpful whenever I had questions. I also really enjoyed transferring all the old event information to the new

(continued on next page)

MEET THE INTERNS

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Yozzie

website, as I got to deep dive into the history of Aurora Picture Show and see all of their previous super interesting programs. All the work I completed and how grateful the staff was for my help was extremely rewarding and I'm happy to have been able to help out."

Maria S. '26 Interned in Post Oak's Lower School Art Department. "I helped the kids complete their art assignments for the class, responded to the questions I could answer,

and sometimes participated in the assignments myself. I also helped clean up and set up. I assisted with Ms. De Leon's class every Thursday. I liked being able to participate in artistic activities weekly while being able to interact with those younger than me. I liked being able to help others with art because it has been a passion of mine since I was little. I tried to emulate how I liked being taught art when I was younger, especially by Art Specialist Ms. Fagala, who was my art teacher at that age as well."



Maria

Andrés Y. '23 "At the Texas Center for Justice and Equity I learned about issues in the criminal justice system such as the bail system and how it



Andrés

gives those with higher income better chances at winning cases, as well as the issue of policing in schools, which fosters an environment of hostility in an environment meant for learning. I also worked with the organization to create a social media campaign to spread awareness of these issues to high schoolers like me. I really enjoyed the work and look forward to my future with the organization." ★

And Our Middle School Reporters



A special thanks to our Middle School (MS) reporters, **Emma L. '27** and **Anya K. '28**, who who helped create and edit articles for our community about MS travel, events, and experiences throughout the school year.

Read their stories on pages 33 & 35 and at

postoakschool.org/news



Student Spotlights

As we look back on the past school year, we are excited to share the stories and contributions made by our student body. Whether working in the classroom or far afield, each student spotlight reflects our mission where students “create their own bold pathways in leading purposeful lives.”

Post Oak Student, Firefighter, and EMT (and Now Alum)

Anderson “Andy” Walsh ’23 embarked on a life-changing adventure during his final semester in High School. With the support of his family, teachers, and friends, Andy delved into the world of Emergency Medical Technician (EMT) training, immersing himself in an intensive Wilderness EMT course offered by the National Outdoor Leadership School (NOLS).

Andy’s journey began with a search for an EMT course that would align with his academic commitments. It was through a recommendation from one of his guides during the Rio Grande January-Term (see page 23) that he

discovered the perfect opportunity. The NOLS Wilderness EMT course not only provided the necessary training to become a registered EMT but also equipped Andy with the skills to administer care in remote and resource-limited environments.

Amidst the hustle and bustle of his academic responsibilities, Andy dedicated himself to completing his International Baccalaureate (IB) work while simultaneously preparing for the EMT course. Thanks to the support of his advisor and teachers, he was able to balance his obligations and embark on this extraordinary journey.

Setting foot in Lander, Wyoming, Andy realized the magnitude of the experience he had signed up for. Amongst a diverse group of participants, including military veterans, law enforcement officers, and college students, Andy’s high school status raised eyebrows. Nevertheless, he approached the course with enthusiasm, ready to prove himself.

The first week of classes proved to be intense, with rigorous training sessions from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., often extending into late evening hours. Andy mastered essential skills such as high-quality team CPR and treatments for complex injuries. As the weeks progressed, exams became a regular occurrence, complemented by hands-on clinical rotations in a local ER during weekends.

One of the most memorable aspects of the course for Andy was his participation in clinicals. Stepping into the ER for the first time, the thrill and nerves intertwined as he assisted in patient care. From loading patients into helicopters for life-flights to witnessing medical procedures, Andy’s experiences reaffirmed his commitment to helping others and underscored the importance of self-care. “After a full shift of viewing the CT scans of liver failure patients, caring for overdose patients, and having the joy of assisting with urinary catheters, I left the ER with a new outlook on life and even more reasons to take care of my body.”

The learning environment at NOLS proved to be both engaging and immersive. Active presentations in the classroom were complemented by realistic scenarios that prepared students for the challenges they may face in their future EMS careers. Andy also appreciated the strong sense of community fostered during his time at NOLS, drawing on his years as a Post Oak student to work effectively as a leader and team member.

Andy’s journey at NOLS was a testament to his perseverance. Juggling exam preparation and skill tests alongside his academic commitments demanded effort and dedication. Nevertheless, with the support and encouragement of his family and the Post Oak community, he embraced the

(continued on next page)



Andy gives the thumbs up for the splint work in his EMT training

POST OAK STUDENT, FIREFIGHTER...

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challenges and passed the test on his first try.

“Throughout my entire time at Post Oak, I have had many teachers that have impacted my life. During my time in Primary, my teacher, Julie Paraguirre, noticed my passion for service and helping others. She appointed me as the ‘Band-Aid Boy’ of the class. Serving in this role and helping my classmates with minor wounds reaffirmed my affection with the life of a first responder. I am a firefighter/EMT with Southside Fire Department, and I eagerly look forward to continuing my service when I go to Oklahoma University in Norman, OK, next year.”

Andy’s adventure serves as an inspiration to us all, reminding us that with determination, support, and self-confidence, we can explore our passions and make a difference in the world around us. 🐾

Right: Sara Avalos-Paez, Kilali Latter, Andrés Yengle, and Leon Hoang showing their new school pride after commencement

Merit-based Scholarships in Focus

Every year Post Oakers are awarded an impressive number of merit-based scholarships from the colleges and universities to which they apply (see page 41). One notable example includes **Andrés Yengle’s** award from The University of Texas at Austin’s Forty Acres Scholars Program, which is a full-ride, merit-based scholarship. It includes full tuition, a living stipend, book and supply stipend, enrichment funds for interests and opportunities outside the classroom, and customized programming. Andrés was one of 64 finalists from across the country, which also included students from a handful of Houston-area schools. According to UT, “the program is a transformational adventure that helps individuals reach their full potential, and, alongside academic achievement, focuses on personal development, relationship building, and gaining perspective.” Congratulations to Andrés and all of our newest alums!

And congrats to **Matthew Watowich ’17** who was awarded a full-tuition merit scholarship to attend the University of Minnesota Medical School as he pursues an MD and possibly a PhD in immunology/cancer biology. Read all our alumni updates starting on page 36 for more news. 🐾



Students Raise \$1,600+ Dollars for Team Trees

by UE Students Sofia C.E. '30, Elizabeth C. '29, Amina M. '30, Mia S. '30, Quinn T. '30, and Tori Y. '29

Trees being cut down and dying of forest fires are great threats to our environment. We, six children from Mrs. Xu’s class (Amina, Sofia, Mia, Tori, Elizabeth, and Quinn), wanted to help address this problem. We found an international non-profit organization called Team Trees,

which plants trees all around the world. For each dollar donated, one tree is planted. We decided to hold a fundraiser to support this organization.

To help with the cause, the children and teachers of Mrs. Xu’s class donated baked goods, toys, art, books, etc., and the fundraiser was held on Friday, October 21, at the [BC] Pavilion. Eight elementary and primary classes

visited the event from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. and helped us raise \$1,639.88.

We are very proud of our final result and the process we went through. As a small team, we worked very hard and learned a lot about coordination, communication, and compromising. We can’t wait to see the 1,640 trees that will be planted around the world because of our effort! 🐾

Montessori Model United Nations in NYC

by Anya K. '28, MS Reporter

The Montessori Model United Nations (MMUN) is a program for Upper Elementary through 10th-grade students centered around the experience of being a delegate in the United Nations (UN).

Students are placed into countries that they will be representing for the UN over the next several months. They are then put into committees with real topics discussed in the United Nations. This year, Post Oak students participated in the Economic and Financial Council (ECOFIN), Disarmament and International Security Committee (DISEC), Food and Agricultural committee (FAO), Human Right Council (HRC), and Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) committees. The delegates represented Pakistan, Vietnam, The

United Kingdom, Greece, Ethiopia, Argentina, and Japan.

"I enjoyed making new friends across the world and learning to make solutions for my topic." —Ambika K. '27

The MMUN process started back in September 2022, with the delegates learning about the history of the UN. Then, they were given their country, partner, and committee, and set off to research their position in the UN. In October, the delegates started to work on their position papers, working hard to refine sentences, add every comma, period, semicolon, and MLA format every source. Finally, delegates began working on their speeches, which was probably one of the easiest parts of MMUN.

While all of this was taking place, the school's MMUN teachers Patricia Onofre, Terrance McNally, Zoe Nuhfer, and Keri Nickerson were working as tirelessly as the delegates for the conference. They organized binders, created assignments, made slideshows, and offered constant support to the delegates. The Middle School delegates had the opportunity to participate in a mock conference on cyberbullying, which would not have been possible without their teachers. After long flights with their parents on February 15, the students lined up for the opening assembly of MMUN 2023, In New York City at the Marriott Marquis Hotel.

"I am very thankful for being able to experience this conference, I practiced my public speaking, and social skills, overall, it was very impactful." —Lucia S. '28



Above: Post Oak Middle School students participated in Montessori Model United Nations in NYC in February 2023, fostering global engagement and diplomacy.

At 8:15 p.m., the opening ceremony began featuring speeches from Judith Cunningham (the founder of MMUN), and the musician Alexander Star. It also included the Parade of Nations, in which delegates lined up to walk with their country's flag in a parade of nations. The flag bearers this year were Lucia S. '28, Sofia B.G. '27, Maria C. '27, and Olivia Sarah C. '27.

The following day marked the actual first conference day, and on this day we worked on topic one and created a draft resolution. On the second day, we repeated the same process for topic 2.

The MMUN experience concluded on February 18, 2023, with the closing ceremony. The closing ceremony was

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Flora, Fauna, & Fun for UE Students at NCI

Upper Elementary (UE) students spent the first week in November exploring the land in New Ulm, Texas, at Nature's Classroom Institute.

by UE Student Katherine F. '29

NCI is always one of the most exciting trips of the school year. Although there are so many aspects of NCI, if you asked me to sum it up into three words, I would say: exhilarating, fun, and educational. Not only is NCI an educational trip, but it is also a community-building environment.

An added bonus is that all of the staff at NCI are always putting their best foot forward in achieving a fun and educational experience for their campers.

Something unique about NCI is how they teach us about 'ort'. Ort is the word they use to describe the food and water waste created at each meal. Personally, I think that weighing the amount of ort after every meal is a great way to show how much we, as a community, can waste. Over the two years that I was able to go to NCI, the highest amount of ort from one meal was 21 pounds, with the lowest being just about 4. Every meal at NCI is different, which is another good

thing about the camp; there is always a plethora of food available to you.

One of my favorite activities at NCI is called RLU which stands for Raised Leg Urination. It may seem like a funny name for the activity (and I agree) but it truly fits! In this nighttime activity, the campers separate into different 'packs'. Once separated, each pack decides who will be the alpha. The alpha is the one who collects the pack's 'prey' which are glowsticks.

RLU was a fun experience for me because I don't usually get to go outside at night, and I especially

don't get to be out in the wilderness, playing a team-building game at night. It truly is a one-of-a-kind experience. After an hour or so (it is really easy to lose track of time), when the activity ends, we all gather and discuss. Some questions that were brought up were "What part of RLU was similar to real wolf packs?" and "What part of RLU was not similar to real wolf packs". I found it interesting to learn about the different properties that wolf packs have. One thing that I learned was that wolves in the wild don't actually have a distinct 'alpha' and instead have more of a parental guardian. ☺



MMUN IN NYC

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very special this year because we had the opportunity to go to the actual United Nations building. In the past four years, we were not able to end the incredible conference at the building. However, this year we all filed into the buses and had our closing ceremony in the United Nations.

"Being allowed to see where such important decisions were made was such an amazing thing for me to experience as a teenager in America."
—Saj M. '27

In conclusion, the 2023 MMUN conference was an unforgettable, unimaginable, and indescribable experience for us all. An experience

only made possible by the hard and diligent work of the MMUN teachers Keri Nickerson, Zoe Nuhfer, Patricia Onofre, and Terrance McNally. We are so thankful for being able to learn so much and have this opportunity as a Montessori school. ☺

Lunar New Year MDC Celebration

by Emma, L. '27, MS Reporter

Sunday, January 22, marked the start of the New Year for many East Asian cultures across the globe. The Museum District Campus (MDC) celebrated the occasion on Thursday, January 26, with food, dances, and games! This year marks the inaugural Lunar New Year celebration organized by both Middle School (MS) and High School (HS) students.

The idea for the students to celebrate together came from Post Oak parent Teresa Lin, and was organized by HS Mandarin & Global Politics teacher Shoulong Zhou, MS Spanish teacher and celebrations manager Patricia Onofre, MS Director Alex Abel, and student Kilali L. '23. Shoulong Zhou thought, "The Lunar New Year celebration is awesome. It's particularly amazing to see that we made the very first celebration with both the High School and Middle School!"

The festivities began in the morning with a presentation put together by MS students Emma L. '27, Raya J. '27, Gael T. '27, Sophie C. '28, Julia S. '28, and Camila R. '28, with the help of Patricia

Onofre. The presentation provided an overview of the traditions and cultural significance of the Lunar New Year. One thing the community learned was that the tradition of the Lion Dance comes from the belief that red and gold colors, as well as loud noises, scare off evil spirits. It was fitting that the next activity they experienced was witnessing a Lion Dance. Four dancers, two for each lion, were dressed in bright reds and golds, showing off their acrobatic skills and strength. The audience of students and teachers loved when the lions began to interact with them. Eytan A. ('28) describes the celebration as a "Very cool experience," and says, "Petting the lion [was one of my favorite parts] because it was fluffy and cute and cute and cute."

Sophia W. '26 also loved the dance and shared, "My favorite thing from the Lunar New Year celebration was seeing the Lion Dance. I was very excited to see this in person and experience it."

The next event was the Chopsticks Race, where students got to show off their chopstick skills in a competitive race. Advisories from both the Middle

and High School entered the race to see which advisory had the fastest skills with chopsticks. Challenges ranged from picking up crackers, small candies, and even wasabi peas. Alexandria R. '27 said it was fun and she was happy her advisory participated, despite the fact that they lost. Ambika K. '27 recalls how she enjoyed watching everyone cheer on their advisories. "It was also very fun to see my advisory participate!" As you can tell from the quotes, all advisories put in great effort and had lots of fun, but special congratulations to the Jacobs Advisory for championing the competition! Max F. '26 is from the winning advisory and described the competition as "tense." He was excited that their advisory won the chopstick race for the second time. "Now we have a legacy to uphold."

This event was a wonderful way to commemorate the Lunar New Year, and one of the few opportunities the Middle School and High School get to spend time together as one community. Federico S. '26 appreciated the occasion and commented on the celebrations: "Spending time with family is a tradition of Lunar New Year. This celebration allowed our, slightly larger, Post Oak family [to] enjoy ourselves." Patricia Onofre loved the idea that both High Schoolers and Middle Schoolers celebrated together and that the Middle School was involved in all aspects of planning and participating, "I enjoyed learning more in-depth about this celebration [through the MS students presentation]. It is a beautiful celebration of diverse cultures and [this year's celebration] was very well hosted by the school." 🐉



Congratulations, graduates!

THE CLASS OF 2023 IS HEADED TO...

- ♦ Boston University
- ♦ Colgate University
- ♦ Drexel University
- ♦ Emerson College
- ♦ Fordham University
- ♦ Kalamazoo College
- ♦ Lake Forest College
- ♦ Northeastern University
- ♦ The Ohio State University
- ♦ Rice University
- ♦ Ringling College of Art and Design
- ♦ Savannah College of Art & Design
- ♦ Texas A&M University, College Station and Galveston
- ♦ The University of Texas at Austin, Plan II Honors
- ♦ Tulane University
- ♦ University of Houston, Honors College
- ♦ University of Oklahoma



Class of 2023 Commencement



Introducing Post Oak School's newest alumni, the Class of 2023! Commencement took place on May 26 at Rice University's Hamman Hall.

This year's speakers included alumna Grace Armstrong '16, along with Head of School Maura Joyce, High School Director James Quillin, and Board of Trustees Chair Alison Wong, all delivering their own words of wisdom and encouragement to the graduates. The seniors selected Anderson Walsh as their class representative, who delivered the closing speech. Also during the ceremony, seniors Gia Sood

(vocals) and Emilio San Vicente Zinzu (guitar) delivered a cover of "The Climb" by Miley Cyrus, creating an unforgettable moment for everyone.

Our newest alums are embarking on their journeys, equipped with the knowledge and experiences gained during their time at Post Oak. The Class of 2023 consists of 21 seniors, who collectively received over \$4,641,244 in merit scholarship offers.

For those who missed the ceremony, a recording is available for viewing at postoakschool.org/commencement.



Alumni Updates

We reach out to our alums each year to share news from college and life beyond Post Oak. Many thanks go to National Honor Society students Niko C., Everest L., Wyatt Q., and Mateo S., who connected with our alumni far and wide. Alums, if you have news to share, please visit postoakschool.org/alumni.

CLASS OF 2022

Andreas Cantu '22

My first year in college was spent in Corpus Christi at the Texas A&M system school, and I will transfer to the main campus in the fall. It was great to have a change in scenery and a much more relaxed transition from high school to college. In terms of academics, Post Oak more than prepared me for the work I encountered and truly set me apart from my classmates. I became involved in recreational sports, joining the referee squad and reffing every sport this year, including children's flag football in Corpus. The year was great, and I'm excited to see what comes next at TAMU College Station.

Asher Forman '22

I finished my first year at Emory University and am looking to study finance. In school, I enjoy the wide variety of classes in the liberal arts and play golf in my free time.

Josey Gregg '22

I am a sophomore at The University of Texas at Austin and had an incredible first year. It was a crazy change coming from a class of 21 students to one of nearly 10,000, but it has been a very manageable transition, and I have felt more than adequately prepared for college! I joined a sorority last semester, where I have made a lot of new friends and gotten the chance to continue my love of service through our chapter's philanthropy. But most of the time, if you ask someone where

I am, their answer will probably be, "At triathlon practice." While classes are, of course, a priority, I unwind and fuel my competitive side by training with my friends on the Texas Triathlon team. This club team gives me a chance to continue competing and spend some weekends traveling around Texas and neighboring states, competing against

athletes from other universities in our conference.

Fabricio Guerra '22

I currently attend Trinity University, class of 2026. I intend to major in chemistry with a Bachelor of Science. So far, college has been a blast. Being an adult with personal freedom



Josey Gregg '22



Fabricio Guerra '22



Francesco Argentina '20, Asher Forman '22, Gabe Avritscher '22, and Andreas Cantu '22

definitely has its downsides, but for the most part, I've had nothing but joy. There's no doubt in my mind that majoring in chemistry is difficult. Very difficult. I've had to learn that the hard way, but one thing I was taught at Post Oak is to enjoy the grind. I usually spend most of my time studying, preparing for labs, writing lab reports, etc. But when I'm not, I'm usually down at the gym playing volleyball because I'm part of the Trinity Volleyball Club. I learned to love volleyball in high school and continue playing it today. Every month we have tournaments in different cities, which involves traveling a lot, but nothing beats being with my friends on the road.



Connor Kissack '22 (second from right)



Leila Lopez Marks '22

Tyler Holland '22

I am at College Station A&M. I am majoring in nutrition sciences, which I transferred into from chemistry. I am not playing on a school team, but I play basketball and golf with friends. I have enjoyed my first year here. I love A&M and am very excited for my next three years. I would say that changing from a small school to a big school is a bit challenging, but Post Oak prepared me so that I can go up to teachers in a way others can't. Post Oak also prepared me to be able to stand up for myself and ask lots of questions. Knowing how to root for myself helped me transfer from chemistry to my new major. I appreciate having gone to Post Oak



Luke Kirchner '22



Tyler Holland '22

and getting into the school I always wanted to attend.

Luke Kirchner '22

I'm a sophomore at Tulane University. So far, college has been great, as I am very involved with the campus's academic and social sides. I am currently on track to major in business management, so I have been taking business-related courses and completing some core classes. I am part of a band in the New Orleans area, playing local venues every weekend, which has been a blast. I am also pledging a fraternity and involved in intramural sports on campus, staying active with my new friends at college. While things are fast-paced at university, I've still been keeping in touch with Post Oak friends!

Connor Kissack '22

Case Western has been really great! I've enjoyed the running club this year and learning new topics in my electrical engineering courses. Case's workload might be rough, but I still have the free time to run long distances around campus and hang out with my friend group. I had a lot of fun this year at Case, and I'm really excited about a research opportunity I got called "Quantum Key District" and becoming vice president of my Christian organization. And I am really happy I ran a 38:51-minute 10 km and an 18:34-minute 5 km this year.

Frederika Luk '22

I'm trying to get a student visa to study at Lancaster University in England. I spent my first year of college at Baylor University, and was a student in the Honors College as part of the Baylor Interdisciplinary Core program (BIC). I enjoyed the variety of on-campus events and the convenience of living

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ALUMNI UPDATES

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in the same building as most of my friends.

Leila Lopez Marks '22

College has been pretty good so far. I finished my first year at Emerson College in Boston. Since Boston is a walking city, I enjoyed exploring on foot. Finding different music venues to play in was also awesome since I play drums. I've been mostly playing rock and jazz at a club. I haven't joined any sports clubs, but I have been trying to get more involved with student comedy clubs on campus. Overall, I enjoyed my first year away and hope next year will be as good.

Henry Quillin '22

I'm a student at The University of Texas at Austin, pursuing a dual degree in the Texas Honors Computer Science and Business (Texas CSB) program. Although I'm busy with coursework, I love socializing and exploring the city of Austin. Additionally, I'm working with some seniors from UT and UPenn on a music technology startup project. I also pledged Delta Tau Delta in spring 2023.

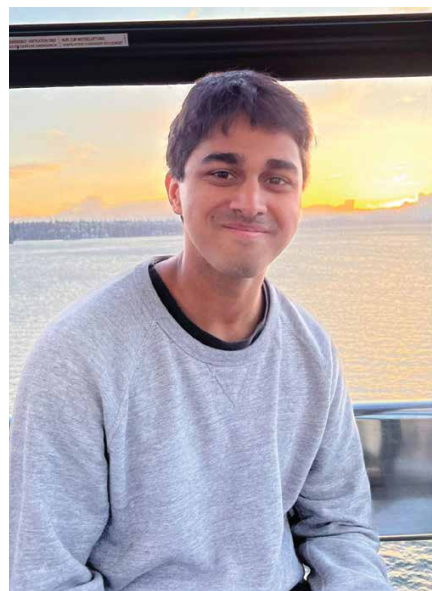
Emory Ying '22

I am a freshman at Haverford College and had an amazing first year! One thing I really enjoy about my school is the community. I have made all different groups of friends through random coincidences and fun school activities. Everyone is very inclusive, including all the different sports teams. I am a part of the women's club soccer team. Our team is very supportive of each other, and the upper-level students are so welcoming to us younglings. I am enjoying my time in college and am so grateful for the opportunity to go to Haverford.

CLASS OF 2021

Ashwin Dev '21

I am currently a sophomore at Reed College, a small liberal arts school in Portland, Oregon, majoring in math and statistics. Recently, I was awarded Reed's Seattle Corporate Fellowship. As part of the fellowship, I traveled to Seattle during spring break with six other students to meet with professionals in the financial services industry. I met with recruiters and alumni ranging from analysts to managing directors of a few financial services firms. Additionally, I was able to tour several offices and gain insights into different career pathways within the industry. At the beginning of the semester, I started working as a course assistant for Introduction to



Ashwin Dev '21



Soren Laskin '21



Henry Quillin '22



Emory Ying '22



Sierra Leo '21

Probability & Statistics at Reed. Before that, I worked as a tutor for the course. I've been playing tennis and trying new outdoor activities in my free time. I've gotten to visit the Oregon Coast, and I tried cross-country skiing for the first time.

Jack Gross '21

College is going pretty well for me (Cornell College). I declared my major as elementary education, and I work in the after-school programs with the Mt. Vernon Elementary School. I recently started working with Cornell's theater.

Soren Laskin '21

College is great. I attend Pitzer College in Claremont, CA. My major is organizational studies and sociology. I'm planning on graduating in four years with a master's in information systems, as well. I'm involved as the Claremont Hillel Social Chair, a tour guide and junior admissions officer, VP, 5c Taekwondo club, chess club, and the Student Senate Curriculum Committee.

I'm really enjoying taking advantage of the other Claremont Colleges and what they have to offer. I'm taking two

classes at CMC and one at Scripps, and I'm always at Pomona for clubs. I also am taking advantage of being in SoCal. I've been to the beach or LA multiple times and am going skiing as well.

Sierra Leo '21

I attend Davidson College in North Carolina (where Steph Curry graduated from). I just completed my sophomore year and officially declared my major in psychology! I have been loving my psychology classes because they are so interactive and immersive. This past semester I worked with an organization outside of Davidson to evaluate their after-school program for my community psychology methods course. I am not involved in any sports, but I am involved with a couple of cultural organizations on campus, OLAS (Organization of Latinx American Students) and PASA (Pan-Asian Student Association). For junior year I plan to be studying abroad all year. I will spend a semester in Tokyo, Japan, and I am thinking about spending my spring semester in Argentina! I have had a great two years and am even more excited for my final two years of college!

Clark May '21

I'm at Trinity University and have especially enjoyed my finance and philosophy classes. I am the president of the Men's Club Basketball team here, but I also participate in boxing, baseball, golf, and tennis and work as a referee! I have gotten on the dean's list the last three semesters, and I recently found out that a song I produced was performed on a popular Chinese television series, "New Generation Hip-Hop Project," which has millions of viewers!

John Mazziotti '21

I finished up my sophomore year at Texas Tech University through the Davis College of Agriculture (formerly known as CASNR). I'm really impressed by the environment here. The staff and student population are just as friendly and accommodating as The Post Oak School and similarly mirror my experience at Post Oak. I know I'm in the middle of nowhere (Lubbock, Texas), but I've learned to enjoy the small-town feeling. I'm a STEM major here at Tech, and although it has been extremely challenging, I've made the Dean's Honors List twice since starting my college career (maintaining a 3.5 or above GPA out of 4). I met the girl of my dreams (see attached image of us after voting) during my first year here, and I couldn't be happier with how my entire college experience is going. On a Houston-related note, I currently work at Snooze's Lubbock location. Not only is the community principle also similar to Post Oak but working at a restaurant that I once knew as down the street from my high school is really neat to think about.

(continued on next page)



Charlie McGill '21 (center) and family



John Mazziotti '21

ALUMNI UPDATES

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Charlie McGill '21

I'm at Wesleyan University in Middletown, Connecticut. I'm majoring in government, minoring in history, and getting a certificate in social, cultural, and critical theory.

I'm enjoying my classes and coursework most of all. I'm super passionate about what I'm studying, and all my classes are intellectually stimulating and genuinely fun. I'm also enjoying intramural sports (basketball, baseball, soccer) and going to the gym; going to talks on campus from guest speakers/chatting with my professors; hanging out with friends every night; writing opinion articles for Wesleyan's Arcadia Political Review; and hosting a radio show on WESU 88.1 FM. I also made the dean's list once.

Sarah Seeliger '21

I'm currently a sophomore at Belmont University in Nashville, Tennessee. I'm double majoring in motion pictures (film) and photography. This semester, I got the opportunity to direct a short film I wrote, which I really enjoyed.

River Theriot '21

I'm at Houston Community College and working on getting an anthropology degree. However, I'm thinking about switching over to automotive technology. I am working at a therapy clinic while in school.

CLASS OF 2020

Jadyn Cleary '20

As a rising senior at Duke University with a self-designed major in Program II (AB)—Digital Platform Design: Accessible User Experience, I remain on the dean's list with distinction, with a perfect GPA this year and ranking

in the top 10th of the Trinity Arts and Sciences College. As a Baldwin Scholar, I have been mentoring in support of their Women's Leadership Development program.

I am currently interning with the Duke Department of Population Health Sciences in support of a grant from the Department of Veterans Affairs to design decision aids to help veterans decide how to file for type 2 diabetes medication.

Persephone Fossi '20

I graduated from Post Oak in 2020. I'm attending Montana State University in Bozeman, Montana.



Jadyn Cleary '20



Sarah Seeliger '21



Persephone Fossi '20



River Theriot '21



Carly Gregg '20



Ilan Kluk '20



Elias Han '20

Carly Gregg '20

I am a junior in the College of Natural Sciences at UT Austin! I am majoring in neuroscience on the pre-medical track and have completed a Spanish for Health Professions certificate. I am about to take my MCAT and plan to apply to medical schools upon graduating from UT next year. My favorite things about UT are living in Austin, the amazing neuroscience program, and all the friends I have made. I definitely spend a lot of my time studying and hanging out with friends. I am also involved in several organizations on campus, including a sorority, Young Life, and Women in Medicine. I also studied abroad in Santander, Spain, last summer as part of my Spanish certificate (which is where the picture was taken).

Elias Han '20

College is going well. I'm starting my senior year at Lewis and Clark College in Portland, Oregon. I recently completed a semester abroad in Ireland, a relatively competitive program to get into. I've been taking a lot of psychology classes and really enjoying them, and I've been on the dean's list for the past year, meaning my GPA was above 3.7. I'm enjoying the school; the campus is gorgeous, I've made a lot of good friends, the class sizes are small, and the professors are friendly, not unlike Post Oak, allowing me to get to know my professors better than I would at a larger school.

Ilan Kluk '20

I am at Texas A&M University in College Station, where I am working towards a degree in economics. On campus, I play lots of basketball, ultimate frisbee, spikeball, and volleyball with my friends in the



Maria Zorrila '20

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ALUMNI UPDATES

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intramural league. A cool thing I am getting to do as a part of my degree is individual research on a topic of my choice for credit. In the economic field, I am looking at how NAFTA impacted Mexico's automobile production industry and how the economy has grown through international companies bringing their business to Mexico.

Jorge Larach '20

I'm going into my senior year of my computer science major at Trinity University this August, which I'm pretty excited about. I've been a member of the tennis club since my sophomore year, and am hoping to become an officer for them this semester. I genuinely miss Post Oak so much, and I'd love to come visit sometime!

Maria Zorrilla '20

I am entering my senior year at NYU Gallatin and finished up my junior year with honors and acceptance into the Dean's Honor Society. I greatly enjoy my studies at Gallatin, pursuing a concentration in business management, entrepreneurship, development, and design. Last semester I completed a six-month internship with Aeffe, a fashion conglomerate with a large portfolio that includes Moschino, Alberta Ferretti, and Philosophy. This past semester I began another six-month internship at a luxury fashion brand called Proenza Schouler. I joined the wholesale and PR team. With my professional and educational endeavors, I feel prepared for my last year at university! I'm grateful for my time at Post Oak and the tools and skills it endowed me with to succeed in college.

CLASS OF 2019

Claire Langenkamp '19

I finished my junior year at the Savannah College of Art and Design. I'm studying illustration with a concentration in publication and design. I hope to illustrate children's books, and this quarter I've been taking a book illustration class, which has been really exciting. In that class, I learned about the processes of illustrating a book, self-publishing vs. working with a publisher, and I started

illustrating a book dummy that I would use when pitching to publishing companies. I hope to finish my illustrations over the summer to have a completed book for my portfolio.

I also really enjoy taking classes where I can draw live models, so I've ended up completing a minor in drawing.

Daniel Mendoza '19

I'm a senior at Baylor University majoring in economics and international business. I have had an



Daniel Mendoza '19



Kayla Mertensotto '19 and Faye Carter '21



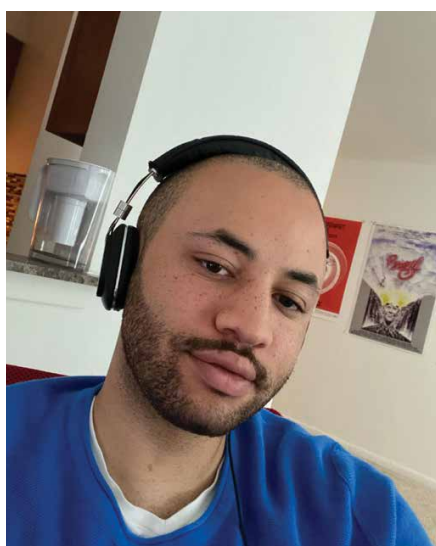
Nathan Rice '19



Claire Thompson '19



Jordan Barger '18



Brayden Chavis '17

enjoyable four years on campus and will apply to law school this fall. I have truly enjoyed my course work, especially courses such as Economic Development and Law and Economics, which has led me to pursue a career in the international arena with an NGO or perhaps a consulting firm. This interest was sparked by my Post Oak J- and A-Term travels to Jamaica, Ireland, and China, which proved to be formative, as they were my first true exposures to life outside of my own perceptions. These experiences ignited a passion in me for learning about other people's lives, taking part in different cultures, and hopefully leaving everyone better off than they were, which is something I hope to do for a living after settling into my career.

Kayla Mertensotto '19

I'm studying computer science at Oberlin College and am interested in game design and other coding development projects. I've been enjoying spending time with my friends and spending time outdoors. I've attached a recent photo of me with another Post Oak alum, Faye Carter (I'm on the left, and she's on the right).

Jordan Polychronopoulos '19

I've served almost four years in the Marine Corps. I've had one deployment (March 2022 to October 2022) and will possibly have another deployment in the next year. I've traveled a lot, including to the Arctic Circle and all over the Baltic countries, where I fell in love with Slavic food. Other than that, there is no real change. I'm still an E3/LCpl (lance corporal), promotion to Cpl being an unknown. Right now, I'm at a base in Wisconsin.

Nathan Rice '19

I'm a Midshipman 2nd Class (junior) at the United States Merchant Marine Academy. I'm really enjoying the unique opportunities I've been granted here at King's Point, such as Sea Year and the EMT program. I'm a member of the academy's pistol team, where we compete against schools like the Naval Academy, MIT, West Point, and Ohio State. I'm currently a petty officer for the Regimental Emergency Services Commanding Officer. I have received a few awards for academic excellence of a GPA >3.5, known as Gold Stars (our version of the dean's list).

Claire Thompson '19

I recently graduated from Ithaca College with a degree in politics and anthropology. In January, I studied abroad in Amsterdam for a month with CIEE, and it was an amazing, beautiful experience. Over the past year, I have served as president of Ithaca's largest and longest-running dance company. Earlier this year, we put on our final show of my college career, and I could not be more proud.

CLASS OF 2018

Jordan Barger '18

I am currently living in Los Angeles and working on a proof-of-concept short film that will hopefully become a feature. I spent a lot of my time at Post Oak working on movies, so it's nice to see that I am still pursuing that path. I am also working as a lead brand ambassador for LaCroix Sparkling Water, as you can see in my picture.

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ALUMNI UPDATES

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CLASS OF 2017

Brayden Chavis '17

I'm in the NIH's post-bac program, doing clinical neuro-oncology research at the National Cancer Institute in Bethesda, Maryland.

Amber Meghani '17

I graduated from UT Austin in 2022, majoring in international relations and business. For the last year, I've been living and working in Dallas while I applied to law school. This fall, I'm excited to be moving back to Houston to begin law school at the University of Houston! One of my favorite memories from Post Oak was traveling to Nicaragua over A-Term with Mr. Grisbee and Dr. Lee.

Max Tribble '17

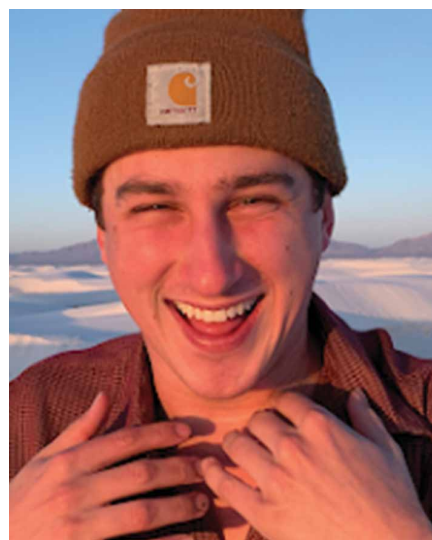
In 2021, I graduated from Trinity University and moved back to Houston. I am working at Centerpoint Energy as a programmer analyst and engaged to get married next year in October.

Matthew Watowich '17

I live in Washington, DC, and am working to conduct clinical research within the Neuro-Oncology Branch at the NIH National Cancer Institute. As a research fellow in Dr. Mark Gilbert's lab, my research is focused on translational immunology to better understand tumor immune microenvironments and advance clinical trials for patients with glioblastoma and other rare CNS cancers. This coming year, I will be moving to Minneapolis, Minnesota, to attend the University of Minnesota Medical School on a full-tuition merit scholarship as I pursue an MD and, hopefully, a PhD in immunology/



Amber Meghani '17



Matthew Watowich '17



Max Tribble '17

cancer biology. In addition to my research/career updates, I remain interested in the arts and travel, both passions that began at Post Oak through J- and A-Term studies and connections with nearby museums.

CLASS OF 2016

Grace Armstrong '16

I'm currently living in Chicago, Illinois. I graduated with my master's last year and am now a licensed professional counselor in Illinois and a doctoral student in Clinical Psychology at The Chicago School for



Grace Armstrong '16

Professional Psychology (TCSPP). I'm a student representative for my cohort, a national campus representative for the Society of Pediatric Psychology (American Psychological Association Division 54), and president of the Pediatric Psychology Collective (student interest group) at TCSPP. I started my diagnostic training this summer at Rush University Medical Center's Autism Assessment, Research, and Treatment (AARTs) Center, working across their early childhood, school-age, and adolescent/adult clinics! Earlier this year, I worked on drafting a poster for the American

Psycho-Oncology Society's Annual Conference and prepping data for a presentation at the Midwestern Psychological Association Annual Conference. While much of my time is dedicated to training to become a psychologist, you can find me finding the best food places in Chicago, doing yoga, playing Sims, or listening to podcasts (always accepting recommendations!).



Emily Randall '16

And Grace was the commencement speaker at Post Oak's class of '23 graduation ceremony!

Emily Randall '16

I am currently working as an environmental specialist for the Ohio Department of Transportation. My job focuses on evaluating, avoiding, and mitigating the environmental impacts of transportation projects such as roads, bridges, culverts, and



Annie (Daugherty) Lewis, '05

multi-use paths. Some of the major environmental areas we investigate include ecological and cultural resources, waterway permitting, environmental justice, and regulated materials.

I live in northwest Ohio with my boyfriend AJ, and when I'm not working, I stay busy gardening, taking care of our reptiles, hiking, doing yoga, and traveling.

2000S (THROUGH 8TH GRADE)

Allison Wawro '10

Allison went west for college and graduated from University of California, Santa Barbara with a degree in biopsychology. She sells intelligence and market research to the top 20 pharmaceutical companies. She and her significant other are avid pickleball players, and you can find them on the courts most weekends, rain or shine.

Annie (Daugherty) Lewis, '05

I'm married and about to have a baby. I used to work in public relations with restaurants, fashion designers, entertainment entrepreneurs, artists, sporting teams, jewelers, and charities. I'm taking a break from working to welcome my child into the world. I worked as an art teacher assistant and a tutor before.

I loved being at The Post Oak School. I felt empowered by my teachers and felt whenever I was unable to succeed, they and older students always helped me accomplish anything I put my mind to. I loved all the trips and learning about different cultures. We studied each religion and traveled to Washington, DC, to learn about our nation. We went to farms and learned how to treat



Jackson Parks '04

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ALUMNI UPDATES

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the earth, grow our own food, and how the Native Americans lived and their relationship to the earth. I graduated from Post Oak in 8th grade (the last grade at Post Oak back then) in 2005. I went to Episcopal High School and Texas Christian University afterwards. I had a great experience at The Post Oak School and would not change it for the world.

Christopher Wawro '05

After becoming a CPA and working as an accountant for a few years, Christopher followed in his parents' footsteps, went to The University of Texas School of Law, and is now practicing law in Houston at Porter & Hedges LLP, specializing in business litigation. He too is engaged, with the nuptials planned for February 2024.

Jackson Parks '04

I am currently living in Salt Lake City, Utah. I work for Traeger Grills as a sourcing engineer. I am married with a six-month-old daughter. I spend most of my free time playing in the mountains, backcountry skiing, rock/ice climbing, canyoneering, fly fishing, and backcountry elk hunting.

I have fond memories of Blackwood Land Institute [from Middle School]. Getting outside was a passion of mine back then, and it still is to this day. Hence, I moved out west because the snow and climbing were rumored to be excellent. Turns out the rumors were true.

William Wawro '03

After graduating from Syracuse University with a degree in film, William continued his passion and currently works for Tyler Perry as a film editor. He lives in LA and recently



Above: Nicholas Hetherington '02

Right: Allison, William, and Christopher Wawro

became engaged, anticipating a wedding in 2025.

Nicholas Hetherington '02

I am now in Austin, working for ESPN. This October will mark my 13th year with ESPN, having lived in Connecticut, California, and now back in Texas. I work on feature documentaries covering all sports. I have been blessed to work on some amazing projects culminating in eight Emmy awards.

I got married in December 2021, and my wife and I are expecting our first child in August. Noah Carvey Hetherington is due on August 9, 2023, and we are so excited.

Post Oak definitely had a huge influence on how I ended up in my career. The creativity that Post Oak allowed me to explore from a very early age serves me well in my field each and every day. Also, being able to work on future projects with fellow Post Oak graduates has been really cool and fulfilling. I hope to enroll my son in Montessori when the time comes!



1990S (THROUGH 8TH GRADE)

Ellen White '98

I'm an actor in NYC and work primarily in musical theater but also do plays, film, and television. Currently, I'm auditioning and taking a lot of classes, but I've been very successful and have booked multiple off-Broadway shows over the last few years. I spend most of my spare time working with dogs, baking, seeing New York theater, and taking acting and dance classes. I recently signed with a new management team and a commercial agent in the city.

I did my very first play at Post Oak (The Little Match Girl), and the plays

and operas we did lit a fire within me to pursue a theater degree at Austin College in Sherman, Texas, followed by two years at Circle and the Square Theater School here in NYC.

Carlin Putman '91

I was at Post Oak from third through eighth grade, circa 91. I wish there were High School then, but it was in the 90s, so not yet. I went to high school at Bellaire and graduated in 1995, where I was in all IB classes. I played lacrosse and then went to UT for a business degree in marketing. I met my husband, Damon Putman, who was also in business there, and we moved to Houston, Texas, where I was from. I joined AIG as a meeting and event planner, and Damon was in banking/finance/investments/hedge fund, etc. We traveled the world, had a great time growing our careers, and I became head of AIG's meetings and events department. After eight years of marriage, we were blessed with Brady, our son, and 18 months later, our daughter, Taylor. They are both attending Post Oak.

One of my biggest memories is creating the recycling program at Post Oak. Houston really didn't even have



Jordan Macha (through 4th grade)

one yet. That's what made Post Oak special—always cutting edge. We even were on the Houston news regarding our program and in a week-long study where we carried a trash bag everywhere to show how much litter we collected. We created a compost pile at school, which was fun.

Darryll De Vera '90

Darryll is currently a dentist. He attended Post Oak from Primary through 8th grade and then attended Strake Jesuit, the University of St. Thomas, and UTDB Houston. He is married with two boys who attend Post Oak. Both started in YCC and now are in Lower and Upper Elementary.

Darryll was also a Post Oak Dads Club co-chair, and last year, he and his wife Laura chaired the Post Oak Fund. This year Laura is a biennial gala co-chair.

Favorite memories of Post Oak include camps, and this year he got to chaperone his oldest son to Camp Allen, which was really special.

1980S (THROUGH 8TH GRADE)

Rachel Bridges '82

I began at Post Oak in 1975 when it was called The Little Schoolhouse. The school only went up to 8th grade, so I left when I "aged out" in 1982. I was well prepared to transition to a traditional day school at the Awty International School for 9th grade. An encounter with Richard "Racehorse" Haynes' wife at Awty (their son Slade attended) piqued my interest in becoming a lawyer. An oil recession hit in 1983, and my family moved.

I attended the University of Oregon School of Law, graduating with a JD in 2000. I received my BA in 1990 from Ohio University in Athens. I have been

a criminal lawyer for 23 years, and I often think about how my analytical reasoning skills were developed by Post Oak's educational style.

I began writing a book, which I hope to publish. My stepbrother Wes Hurley made a film about his coming to America and living with my dad in Potato Dreams of America. The feature film debuted at SXSW. It's available on iTunes and other VOD platforms. The book tells my father's backstory, which is left open in the film. Actor Dan Lauria from the original "Wonder Years" plays my dad in the movie.

Jordan Macha (through 4th grade)

Based in Houston, Texas, Jordan is committed to furthering justice and equity in her community by working to dismantle systemic racism and oppression in the pursuit of environmental justice. Currently, she serves as a nonprofit consultant, working with environmental justice and conservation organizations on the Gulf Coast.

Jordan lives in the Heights with her husband, Kent. They enjoy spending time at Whitener Ranch—one of the oldest continuously-owned family ranches in Texas—which her husband owns and operates, as well as enjoying the incredible performing and visual arts throughout Houston.

Jordan's love for the arts was cultivated early during her time at Post Oak Elementary, where she participated in various plays and was introduced to the wonderful world of theater, both in and out of the classroom. Having participated in the annual Post Oak opera at an early age, Jordan has maintained a lifelong love of the theatre and ballet. ☺



Top: All employees gather at the start of the school year for in-service.
Bottom: Some of our MDC faculty and staff pause for photo during the 2023 High School Odyssey trip.

Employee Spotlights

Manuel Mejia, Maintenance Director

by *Juliette Casas,*
Development Assistant

Maintenance Director Manuel Mejia has worked at The Post Oak School since 1985, making him Post Oak's longest-serving employee. For over 38 years, the school has been in his care.

Having arrived from Guatemala only three years prior, he was eager for a chance to establish himself in this new country. He was employed part-time at Randalls on Wesleyan and Bissonnet, where he learned the ropes of facility maintenance systems.

In his first year at Post Oak, the city of Bellaire was quieter; the school was temporarily housed across Bissonnet Street, and construction was underway on the Bissonnet Campus building. He recalls, chuckling, how Henry Walner, the then-facilities supervisor, handed him the keys to the school after only three days in his new job. He said it

was his sole responsibility from then on to care for Post Oak during this dynamic transition. Henry had seen in him a responsible and trustworthy man.

Manuela Yukrin, one of the teachers, would often translate for Manuel to help him better understand and perform his job. He is sometimes grateful that he had language barriers (as a non-native English speaker) because, he states, it made him earn his position and respect through actions and service. He used to wear many hats, from landscaping to painting, and stripping and waxing the floors in the summers.

Mirna Andrade-Salgado, technology director at The Post Oak School, has known Manuel for many years and notes his generous and helpful heart. "He often searches for ways he can help with school supplies and technology equipment for schools in

Guatemala, where his sister works as a teacher. When called upon, he jumps to the opportunity to help anyone and everyone."

The community at The Post Oak School supported him through his transition to an American citizen by providing character witness recommendations. His children were able to immigrate and even worked part-time for the school for a brief period.

Manuel has seen many phases in the school's history. There were difficult times when the school struggled and he had only two assistants. The job, he says, has gone through changes as well. As technology evolved, he remembers feeling discouraged when work orders started being submitted through online platforms and not in print or hand-written forms. He doubted his ability to adapt to new technologies, but his colleagues and present-day facilities director Matt Thompson were able to encourage him and support him through it. Manuel sees things have continued to improve over time and he feels supported in his work. Matt says, "Manuel is a kind soul, always looking to go above and beyond to please everyone. He is extremely dedicated to his job and the school, is hard-working, and has an eye for perfection."

Reflecting on the work and his team, Manuel shared, "This job is not so simple that anyone can just pick it up, as it requires a trustworthy character and a teamwork environment. It carries

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Debbie Henderson, MDC Administrator

by Christina Kopanidis-Cantu,
Development Director

Known to students and staff as the mom of Museum District Campus (MDC), Debbie Henderson's caring and kind temperament and her desire to help wherever needed have made her a beloved part of the Post Oak administration for 27 years.

She has been married to Todd Henderson for 33 years and has two grown sons, Wade and Brian. Her younger son Brian started in the toddler environment and went through Post Oak's Middle School.

Debbie started thinking about teaching when she was halfway through college at Texas State University, but it was too late to change her major. After getting her degree in Fashion Merchandising with a minor in Business Administration, she worked as a manager in retail for five years, then moved to banking for eight years. Looking for a change, she met with a personnel agency whose owner was a parent at Post Oak. A position as office manager was available at the school, and she interviewed with then head of school John Long and admissions director Kay Burkhalter, who both quickly agreed to bring her on board.

That was in 1996. Since then, Debbie has enjoyed watching the school grow from having one campus with 350 students to two campuses with the addition of a High School division and 500 students. Seven years ago, Debbie moved from being the office manager at the Bissonnet Campus (BC) to the MDC administrator, working on logistics and administrative duties to support the Middle and High School faculty and staff.

Post Oak and Montessori played a significant role in helping Debbie raise her children. The camaraderie and support of her Post Oak family helped her through various personal and health challenges for which she is very grateful.

Debbie smiles when asked to recall her favorite moments at Post Oak. "Some of my best memories have been helping the young children at BC get into their car at the end of the day. They would lovingly share stories from their day or show me artwork they had made. Today, I get the same joy speaking with our adolescent students and hearing from alumni when they come back to visit and give us updates."

When asked about the qualities needed to be a Post Oak employee, her



response is quick: "Patience, a sense of service, being a lifelong learner, kindness, wanting to be part of a team, and being friendly." That's Debbie!

To those attributes, we will add that Debbie helps strengthen the community culture at Post Oak. She has worked with students as a point person on events and activities such as Prom, Quad Fest, yearbook, travel, and more. Debbie truly cares about the students and families and makes Post Oak a welcoming place for all. ☺

MANUEL MEJIA
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a lot of personal responsibility." He has always been involved in selecting his team to ensure they are a good fit and meet his standards. He values efficiency and meticulous cleanliness and strives to serve with excellence.

Managing his team, he assigns responsibilities with the intention that "every member retains their dignity and respect. Tasks are shared by all in rotations so that no one gets discouraged."

In his free time, Manuel enjoys spending time with his family. His

Christian faith is important to him, and he regularly attends his community church. He is also a small business owner and contracts home improvement and construction services. Manuel feels better equipped now, looking back on his time here. He has developed with the job, and it has matched his development in his life. ☺

EMPLOYEE ANNIVERSARIES

Each May, we celebrate milestone anniversaries at our end-of-year employee luncheon. Congrats, all!

5 YEARS

Peggy Larrow
Rebecca Smith
Emily Milani
J'anvieu Parnell
Mike Beradino
Sydni Doughtie
Ashley Krug
Naomi Prevot
Landon Bagby
David Roddy
Karyn Smith
Tiffany Trimble
Suanny Vasquez

10 YEARS

Andrea Novak
Saida Fagala
Kim Harrison
Lindsay Mistretta

15 YEARS

Jenna Pel

20 YEARS

Orly Kluk
Keri Nickerson

Emily Hansen, YCC Teacher

by Sarah Gifford, Communications Associate

Young Children's Community (YCC) lead teacher Emily Hansen has been with The Post Oak School for almost 20 years. She has been an integral part of this community, specifically in the Primary and YCC classrooms. Emily's journey at Post Oak began in 2004 as a substitute, after a move to Houston from Oregon. Over the last 19 years, she has been an assistant and lead in Primary, and has worked the last eight years as a lead teacher in YCC.

Emily was introduced to Montessori by her Aunt Kathy, who worked as a Primary guide. This led to Emily's fascination with human development, which has driven her to pursue a deeper understanding of Montessori pedagogy and practice. Emily currently holds Association Montessori Internationale (AMI) diplomas at the Primary and Assistants to Infancy levels, as well as a master's in Montessori Education from Loyola University. She is finishing the AMI Training of Trainers Program at the Birth to Three level and hopes to be an auxiliary trainer by fall 2023.



Emily knew from a young age that she wanted to work with children. Her teacher from kindergarten to third grade had a huge impact on her life and influenced this desire. "I still think back to my relationship with her and how special she made me feel, how accepted I was in that community, and how interactive learning was." Emily has translated this into her classroom with utmost importance. "One thing that I focus on is building strong connections and trusting relationships with children and their families." This means being responsive to the children's needs, yet not solving every problem for them. By showing the child that they are safe and supported, they learn to trust themselves. She knows that when children have trust in the world, they gain confidence in themselves, grow in their independence, and are able to take necessary risks for learning.

If you have ever interacted with Emily or observed her classroom, you've seen her love for working with the young community. She said, "One of the reasons is that they live fully in the present moment. All of the things that we take for granted and find to be a little mundane or ordinary, are so fascinating to them." Not only that, Emily also knows the importance of the brain development happening at this time in their life. This is something that she is passionate about. Emily is able to use this knowledge to influence her interactions with children and prepare an optimal environment for learning. She says, "The importance of being a role model is like no other for this age group, as they begin to discover their own person." 🐾

A large group of people are gathered at an outdoor event, likely a school fundraiser, under a basketball court structure. The scene is filled with people of various ages, some standing and talking, others seated at round tables covered with white cloths. The setting is outdoors, with trees and a building visible in the background. The event appears to be a social gathering with food and drinks.

2023–24 Event Chairs

FAMILY FUN DAY

Vareen and Dave Cunningham, Rhian and Lane McKinney,
Sabina and Mani Walia | Mystery Box Chair: Victoria Goldstein

BIENNIAL GALA

Jennifer Bosch and Laura De Vera
(see back cover for details)

POST OAK FUND

Maura Joyce, Head of School

Creating Connections with the Parents Association

by Sabina Walia, Vareen Cunningham, and Rhian McKinney, 2022–2024 POPA Chairs

What a tremendous 2022–2023 year we had! If it felt full and busy from start to finish, that's because it was.

We had the joy of connecting and reconnecting more often than in years past with the introduction of class-level family socials in the fall and a sprinkling of POPA morning and evening socials throughout the year.

This past year had some magical highlights. Family Fun Day was buzzing with wacky science energy, and

it showcased the students' most highly anticipated campus improvement of the year: the turf! The turf was appreciated once again during the fan-favorite Dads Club Movie Night, as well—it was a truly enchanting night with popcorn, picnic blankets, and a movie under the stars. Our community also came together to support faculty on a monthly basis with POPA Workdays on the first Friday mornings of each month, where the turnouts were so fantastic, there was often a shortage of paper cutters! The spring saw our community come together with our annual MLK Day community service event and the

return of the Putting for Post Oak Golf Tournament on the verdant grounds of the Golf Club at Houston Oaks. In between those marquee events, there were all the other fun traditions: Book Fair (great new setup!), Quadfest, MDC Coffeehouse, Commencement, Camp Allen, Nature's Classroom Institute (NCI), luncheons, field trips, gardening days, countless other classroom events, and the make-your-heart-melt livestream of the All-School Assembly. Our calendars were full, and so were our hearts!

At large and small events alike, we are reminded that it's our community of families that makes Post Oak so special. We had a stellar group of volunteers and participants in 2022–2023, and we look forward to all the wonderful events to come as we continue celebrating a Post Oak milestone anniversary: 60 years! 🎉



Left page: Parents kicked the school year off at the annual POPA Welcome Event
This page: (Left) MLK Jr. Day blanket-making community service (Right) Movie Night

Golfing Good Times

The second biennial Putting for Post Oak golf tournament, held at the exclusive Golf Club at Houston Oaks in April 2023, brought together the school's community for a day of fun, support, and friendly competition. With 19 teams teeing off in favorable weather conditions, golfers navigated the challenging course, vying for prizes in various categories. After an exciting round of play, participants gathered for lunch, sharing stories and enjoying a silent auction. At the awards ceremony, Marcus Spagnoletti's team, Dolce Vita, took home first-place bragging rights!

Many thanks to event chairs Susanna and Clay Kartye and committee members Darryll De Vera, Rob Johnson, Khalid Kajani, Carlin Putman, Whitney Walsh, and Christi Zweig. Our appreciation also goes to event and student sponsors and the High School golf team led by Coach David Roddy. 🏌️



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Philanthropy *at Post Oak*

by Whitney Walsh, P '22, '23, & '28, Board of Trustees

I have vivid memories of each of my children singing “Head, Shoulders, Knees, and Toes,” a nursery rhyme that develops body awareness with word association.

As they joyfully tapped each named body part, first with a charming lack of coordination and soon with impressive ease and speed, they marveled at matching their words with actions, their Mastery of Self budding.

We all know well the joy that comes with matching your words to your actions. There is a quiet confidence in knowing that you do what you say you will do or act in accordance with your beliefs. This feeling of well-being is enhanced when we are in unison with others who share the same values. Community is Post Oak’s hallmark,

what sets us apart and “Challenges the Norm.” We are committed to our mission of following the child as they forge their own bold pathways. We each chime in with our own stories of how Post Oak nurtures the whole child and celebrate together our carefully curated and maintained educational garden.

Community Is a Mindset.

Just like in the childhood song, our sense of community begins in our head

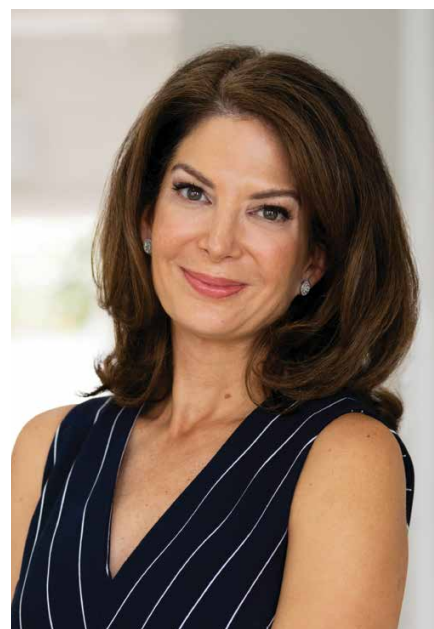


PHOTO BY TIFFINY GIST

with what we know to be true. Post Oak is a safe and nurturing community that offers a home away from home, complete with an extended family of caring faculty and staff. We take pride in each child who attends our school and warmly welcome all families into our fold. Post Oak intentionally cultivates a sense of belonging. Lessons can expand or contract to meet students at their level of readiness. Likewise, parents are invited to engage in the school at their individual level of comfort. We have community

(continued on page 57)

members who choose to volunteer, support, advocate or lead, and their school satisfaction often correlates with their personal involvement. We believe Post Oak is our school, and we believe in its method and mission to educate our children. It is the school we thoughtfully chose to nurture our children.

Community Is Standing Shoulder to Shoulder.

This year Post Oak's Annual Fund raised a record \$497,000 and reached 100% parent participation on the Bissonnet Campus for the first time and 94% participation overall. This impressive feat underlines the power of a school community that chooses to stand shoulder to shoulder to support the growth and advancement of our school. We each did our part—meaningful, intentional investments to match our individual readiness. We are actively building a Culture of Meaningful Giving, beyond tuition, towards doing our best work.

Our Community Is a Classroom.

One of the most identifiable aspects of Montessori education is the way classrooms are arranged to suit the age, size, and ability of the child. Teachers regularly and respectfully kneel to be at eye level with young students. Emphasis is placed on empowering students towards independence and choice. Montessori learning is not limited to the classroom; it encourages

educational experience beyond its walls. Our children are being taught to question, observe, and travel well beyond a standard curriculum. They absorb their environment, its beliefs, and attitudes. Our graduates continuously report back that the Post Oak community is unique and it influenced their sense of self and worldview. We want them to continue to thrive in an environment where they witness collaboration, commitment, and cumulative effort. They will mirror our spirit of generosity, our cheerful desire to build, create, and ensure a strong institution.

Our Community Stands Tall.

Post Oak School inspires life-long learners. Our graduates are not solely motivated by external metrics but rather are fueled by internal curiosity and genuine interest in our world. They have learned to stretch themselves for the reward of understanding more than for a grade. It has become a tradition for the senior class to coordinate a senior prank, an often mischievous but harmless way to be remembered. The Class of 2023 chose to write uplifting quotes on the sidewalks in chalk throughout the Bissonnet Campus

as encouragement to the younger students. With the bright spotlight of the future focused on them, they chose to shine on others and give hope. They stood tall and gave back. **Be proud, Post Oak. These are your kids, your future, and your investment at work.**

As we start a new school year, I hope you will participate in our Culture of Meaningful Giving. Our society is obsessed with checking out our neighbor's grass, wondering if it is greener. Rather than peeking over the fence to see what others are doing, let's stand on our own tip toes to be who we say we are, to match our words to our actions, and fully embrace being what we are known for... the Post Oak Community. Be all in: Head, Shoulders, Knees, and Toes. 🐾

It has become a tradition for the senior class to coordinate a senior prank, an often mischievous but harmless way to be remembered. The Class of 2023 chose to write uplifting quotes on the sidewalks in chalk throughout the Bissonnet Campus as encouragement to the younger students. With the bright spotlight of the future focused on them, they chose to shine on others and give hope.

With Gratitude to Our Community

Below is a list of donors who contributed gifts during the 2022–23 school year.

Reflecting on the 2022–23 school year, we extend our heartfelt appreciation to all the families and community members who supported Post Oak’s mission through generous contributions last year. All gifts, whether big or small, have made a meaningful impact on the lives of Post Oak students and the entire school community. A special nod of thanks goes to our Post Oak Fund chairs, Laura and Darryll De Vera, for their tireless work on that campaign, which raised \$497,000!

Additional thanks go to our Golf Tournament Chairs, Susanna and Clay Kartye, for a great time on the green and raising just under \$90,000 for Post Oak. With deep gratitude, we present our 2022–23 donor lists and offer thanks to all who have shared the spirit of philanthropy with Post Oak. Thank you for your belief in the work we do each day and for partnering with us.

—Christina Kopanidis-Cantu, Development Director

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wish to report an error or omission, please contact
Christina Kopanidis-Cantu at 281-822-8024 or
by email at christinacantu@postoakschool.org.*

*Thank you,
contributors!*



About The Post Oak School

The Post Oak School is an educational leader—both among Houston’s top private schools and among the more than 5,000 Montessori schools across the country. Post Oak has operated continuously since 1963 and is a non-profit corporation. With a faculty and staff of over 120, we serve a culturally diverse student population of 500 and provide a comprehensive education founded on AMI Montessori principles from early childhood starting at 14 months through high school.

Post Oak has two campuses to serve our four academic communities from early childhood through high school. The Bissonnet Campus (BC) is home to the Young Children’s Community (starting at 14 months) through Elementary (grades 1 to 6). The school occupies a 3.44-acre lot on the corner of Bissonnet Street and Avenue B in Bellaire, a suburb of Houston, Texas.

The Museum District Campus (MDC) is home to our Middle and High School and is located at the corner of Montrose and Autrey Street in Houston’s Museum District. The Museum District is the perfect launching point for the interdisciplinary partnerships, internships, service learning, and travel experiences central to this school’s mission. The High School program culminates in two years of the International Baccalaureate (IB) diploma program. ☛

The Post Oak School does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, or nationality or ethnic origin with regard to hiring, admissions, or in the administration of any of its programs.

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This page: Seniors walk the halls and classrooms of the Bissonnet Campus to rousing applause from faculty, staff, and students before the All-School Assembly at the end of the school year

Right: Family Fun Day is a blast!

August–September 2023,
 Houston, Texas

www.postoakschool.org

See you soon!



Join us for one, some, or all of these events during the 2023–24 school year. Visit postoakschool.org/calendar to see event times and details.

For Families

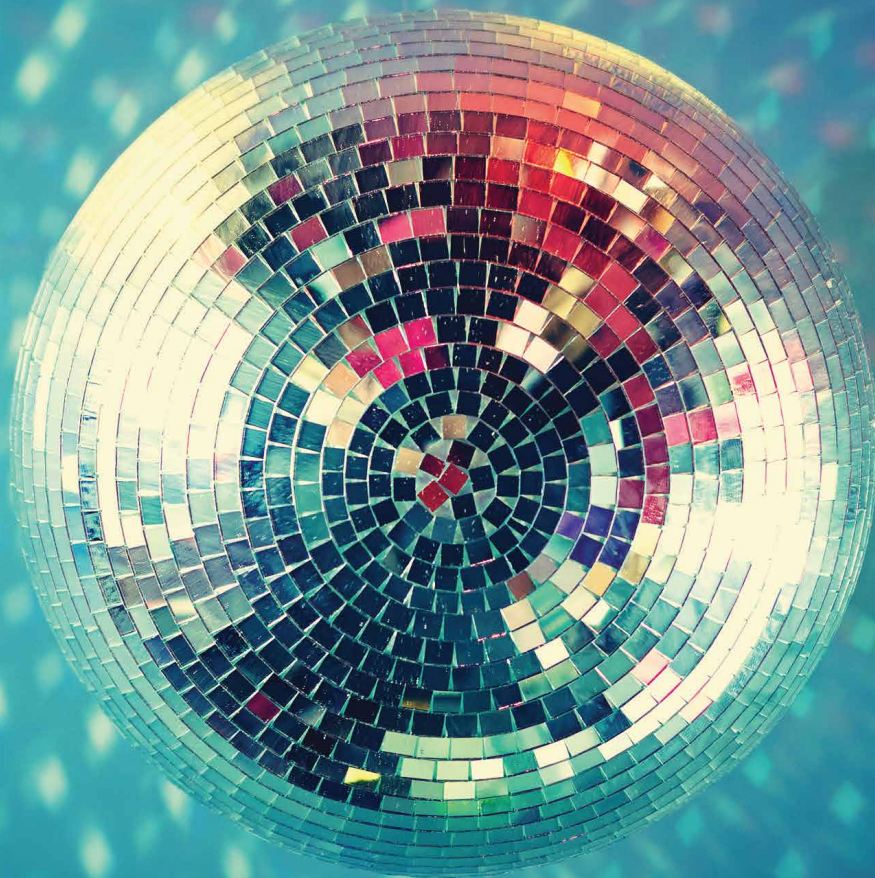
Elementary Family Social	Thurs., Aug. 10
PRI Family Social	Sat., Sept. 9
YCC Family Social	Sat., Sept. 23
Family Fun Day	Sat., Nov. 4
Community Service in the Gym	Mon., Jan. 15
Book Fair	Sat., April 6

For Adults

Community Coffee for parents	Fri., Aug. 25
POPA Parent Welcome Event	Wed., Sept. 13
MDC Parent Social	Wed., Oct. 4
Biennial Gala	Sat., March 2
End-of-Year Community Party	Tues., May 14

The
POST OAK
SCHOOL

4600 BISSONNET ST.
BELLAIRE, TX 77401



BIENNIAL
GALA 2024

Join us for Post Oak's biennial gala and fundraiser on
Saturday, March 2, 2024, at Hotel ZaZa in Houston's Museum District.
Underwriting available starting August 2023. Learn more at
www.postoakschool.org/gala.