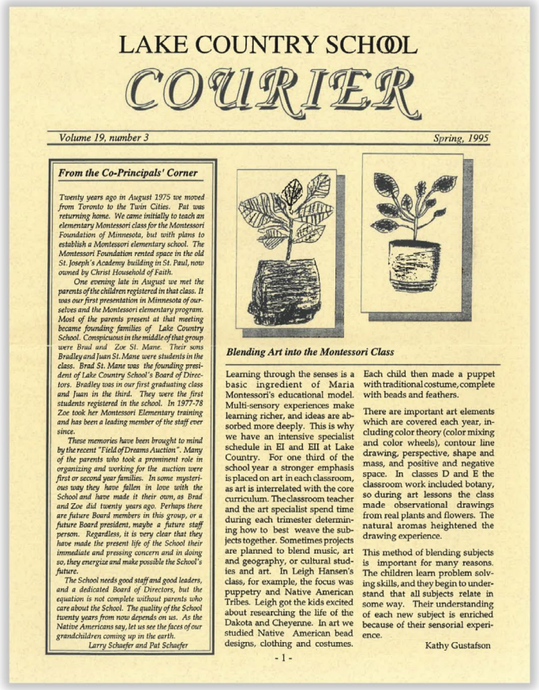
Lake Country School

Courier

Volume 49, Issue 1
Winter 2026



Through



LAKE COUNTRY SCHOOL

COURIER

Volume 19, number 3 — Spring, 1995

From the Co-Principals' Corner

Twenty years ago in August 1975 we moved from Toronto to the Twin Cities. Pat was returning home. We came initially to teach an elementary Montessori class for the Montessori Foundation of Minnesota, but with plans to establish a Montessori elementary school. The Montessori Foundation rented space in the old St. Joseph's Academy building in St. Paul, now owned by Christ Household of Faith.

One evening late in August we met the parents of the children registered in that class. It was our first presentation in Minnesota of ourselves and the Montessori elementary program. Most of the parents present at that meeting became founding families of Lake Country School. Conspicuous in the middle of that group were Brad and Zoe St. Marie. Their sons Bradley and Juan St. Marie were students in the class. Brad St. Marie was the founding president of Lake Country School's Board of Directors. Bradley was in our first graduating class and Juan in the third. They were the first students registered in the school. In 1977-78 Zoe took her Montessori Elementary training and has been a leading member of the staff ever since.

These memories have been brought to mind by the recent "Field of Dreams Auction". Many of the parents who took a prominent role in organizing and working for the auction were first or second year families. In some mysterious way they have fallen in love with the School and have made it their own, as Brad and Zoe did twenty years ago. Perhaps there are future Board members in this group, or a future Board president, maybe a future staff person. Regardless, it is very clear that they have made the present life of the School their immediate and pressing concern and in doing so, they energize and make possible the School's future.

The School needs good staff and good leaders, and a dedicated Board of Directors, but the equation is not complete without parents who care about the School. The quality of the School twenty years from now depends on us. As the Native Americans say, let us see the faces of our grandchildren coming up in the earth.

Larry Schaefer and Pat Schaefer

Blending Art into the Montessori Class

Learning through the senses is a basic ingredient of Maria Montessori's educational model. Multi-sensory experiences make learning richer, and ideas are absorbed more deeply. This is why we have an intensive specialist schedule in EI and EII at Lake Country. For one third of the school year a stronger emphasis is placed on art in each classroom, as art is interrelated with the core curriculum. The classroom teacher and the art specialist spend time during each trimester determining how to best weave the subjects together. Sometimes projects are planned to blend music, art and geography, or cultural studies and art. In Leigh Hansen's class, for example, the focus was puppetry and Native American Tribes. Leigh got the kids excited about researching the life of the Dakota and Cheyenne. In art we studied Native American bead designs, clothing and costumes. Each child then made a puppet with traditional costume, complete with beads and feathers.

There are important art elements which are covered each year, including color theory (color mixing and color wheels), contour line drawing, perspective, shape and mass, and positive and negative space. In classes D and E the classroom work included botany, so during art lessons the class made observational drawings from real plants and flowers. The natural aromas heightened the drawing experience.

This method of blending subjects is important for many reasons. The children learn problem solving skills, and they begin to understand that all subjects relate in some way. Their understanding of each new subject is enriched because of their sensorial experience.

Kathy Gustafson

Spring 1995



LAKE COUNTRY SCHOOL COURIER SUMMER 2007

CELEBRATIONS & TRADITIONS

Twenty-five years of biking

by Doug Alecci

Many traditions have evolved over the years in the Lake Country School Junior High program. Perhaps the longest standing tradition is the end-of-the-school-year bike trip. Twenty-five years ago, the first year of the Junior High program, fourteen students and five adults rode west out of the city into the spacious outer suburbs on a three day, two night biking and camping adventure. I remember getting back to school late for graduation because of a road construction detour! We walked into the ceremony at the Incarnation School auditorium tan, sweaty, dirty and elated that we had accomplished our goal.

Much has changed since that first bike trip, but the reasons for doing the trip remain the same. Just as we start the year with our 15-day Odyssey to build our Junior High community, we end the year with a challenging adventure that requires the Junior High community to work together to make the experience the best that it can be for everyone. We end with our bike trip to celebrate our year together.

Over the years we have done five different bike trips in Minnesota and four different trips in Wisconsin. We have biked and explored much geography, from the flat pothole lake prairies of western Minnesota to the non-glaciated hills of western Wisconsin. On all of these trips we have experienced the effortless joys of long downhills and tailwinds and the exhausting frustrations of cold rainy weather and long, hot, humid days.

Recently, with the creation of the three-year cycle in the Junior High, we have settled on three trips. The trips are five-day, four-night experiences and they are all just over 100 miles. This year we ride from Madison Lake, Minnesota (northeast of Mankato) to Red Wing. We use the Sakatah Singing Hills Trail and the Cannon Valley Trail for part of our ride. Last year we rode from Trempealeau to Reedsburg, Wisconsin, on four continuous bike trails, one of which, the Sparta-Elroy Trail, was the first railroad-grade bike trail developed in the U.S. The trail features three tunnels, which are a major highlight of the trip. Next year we ride from Jay Cooke State Park (near Duluth) to St. Croix State Park (east of Hinckley). This trip uses the Willard Munger State Trail for part of our ride.

On the first day of each trip, we bus to our

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Summer 2007



Lake Country School Courier

LAKE COUNTRY SCHOOL

Volume 35, Issue 3 — Summer 2012

Speeches by Lake Country's 2012 Valedictorians

Learning the meaning of community

By Ora Jane Hammel

On the very first day of class, I realized what an amazing school Lake Country is. It's my fourth grade year, and we are sitting on the blue carpet in a circle listening to Mindy, Class II teacher. There are sixth, fifth, and fourth graders in this class. I don't know any of the other students, for it's my first day at this school.

Ora Hammel, St. Paul Academy

Mindy introduces herself and then right away says, "Get to work." Everyone jumps up, finds a table and starts working.

I walk up to Mindy, completely confused, and ask her, "Wait, so I can do anything school appropriate?" and she responds, "Yes, but if you would like me to give you something to work on, I can." I reply, "No, that's ok."

From that moment on I realized the building I am standing in isn't a cage where we all face the teacher with our individual desks, completely isolated from the other students, listening and taking notes off of the whiteboard. It is a community, (though at that time I really didn't know what a community meant).

Now it's my eighth grade year and I'm moving on to high school. I visited many different schools, looking for specific characteristics — teachers who care about teaching, students who enjoy class and who are able to interact in class and with each other, freedom of speech, and freedom of decision. All these characteristics I was looking for are true to our school. If I went to a high school where the students didn't care about what the teacher was saying, I would be sad. These are my own values now that I learned at Lake Country School and will take with me.

Our teachers really care about teaching. Having someone critique and complement a report or an art piece you made inspires you, and that's exactly what every teacher here has done for me. They really want your work to be done well, so they work with you. When a Lake Country teacher critiques our paper by writing a note with constructive criticism, it's showing the students that they are passionate about what they teach. We students should appreciate the fact that our teachers care, and we should always thank them.

Another thing I was looking at in the high schools was the students' behavior. At Lake Country we are given the chance to lead and participate in class and group discussions; we have action groups, we help each other, and we want to learn. At Lake Country we lead, we follow, we invent, and we are free to do tons of activities — not just junior high students but all students. Our school has all the characteristics I was looking for in a high school, and it was hard to find a high school that had all of them. In fact, I didn't, because Lake Country is unique. We are a Montessori school.

This school taught me many life lessons that I will take with me as I leave for high school. At my first conference I was told I was working too hard; I really tried to understand what that meant. My teachers told me to take time to enjoy my work and I thank them for that. I learned to enjoy as well by observing my teachers' passions.

As an example, Doug would be presenting a lesson when he'd see a bluebird outside the window. He'd stop what he was saying, point and yell, "Bluebird." We'd all look outside to see the bird, and then go back to listening to Doug.

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Summer 2012



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Spring / Summer 2023

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Summer 2023

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Contributing Writers



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Lake Country School
3755 Pleasant Ave.
Minneapolis, MN 55409

612-827-3707
lakecountryschool.org

Head of School
Ben Moudry

Admissions Director
Katie Haag

Advancement Director
Nancy Segreti

Finance & Facilities Director
Onaida Whitney

Photographers
Brianne Bland
LCS Faculty & Staff
Renny McCauley
Slow Road Photography

Courier Editor
Sophie Jonsson

Lake Country School is a Montessori learning environment that fosters independence, critical thinking, and creativity within each child. We are a community that promotes diversity and inclusion, as well as respect and responsibility to self, to others, and to the earth.

Lake Country School
MONTESSORI



From the Head of School & Board Chair

Thank you for reading the Winter 2026 edition of the Courier! 2026 is a special year for Lake Country, because this coming fall marks the beginning of our 50th anniversary as a school, as well as the 30th anniversary of the Land School.

We are both honored to lead Lake Country School into this milestone anniversary. There truly is no place like Lake Country. At LCS, students are trusted and respected, starting with their freedom of movement and choice in Children's House all the way through their extended travel experiences—the Odyssey, Farm Stay, and the Bike Trip—in Junior High. They are guided and nurtured not only by our incredible staff, whose relationships with students deepen over the course of multiple years in the same environment, but also by each other, as a result of mixed-age Montessori classrooms and student mentor-mentee pairings. And they are given the opportunity to foster genuine curiosity and intrinsic motivation through hands-on engagement with Montessori materials and the world around them, rather than screens, grades, and tests.

As LCS co-founders Pat and Larry Schaefer wrote in their book, *Creating a Real School*, "Lake Country didn't match what the larger world thinks a school should impose on a child: students should be compelled to sit and listen at once to the same tiring lessons and complete the same assignments. Information should be imparted on the belief that it would matter someday to some future school, not because of its relevance to a child's curiosity about the world." LCS was founded in opposition to these notions, with a deep belief that education can and must be better, and that Dr. Maria Montessori's vision of education as a movement for peace embodied these ideals. Indeed, our society is slowly realizing that the people who are best positioned to adapt to our high-tech, rapidly changing world are exactly the types of people that LCS has been fostering for the past fifty years.

As the Schaefers also note in *Creating a Real School*, "We hold that we are being true to the Montessori method of scientific pedagogy when we allow for innovation. Science is always questioning, examining, and renewing, and it is never doctrinaire." A lot can—and does—happen in one year, let alone fifty. Lake Country must simultaneously honor and preserve its incredible legacy while also looking to the future and responding to the needs of our challenging times. We are particularly grateful, as Kate is in her third and final year as Board Chair and has led the Board in close partnership with Ben, helping to steward and strengthen the LCS brand and legacy through the complexities of the pandemic and the broader social context following George Floyd's murder, while also improving systems and structures to position the school well for the future. She hopes to leave behind a legacy that honors the balance between Lake Country's rich history and its very bright future.

Thank you, as always, for being part of the community that nurtures and sustains this one-of-a-kind school. We look forward to joining you in partnership and gratitude as we greet the promise of Lake Country's next fifty years.

Ben Moudry, Head of School

Kate Thulin, Chair, Board of Trustees
















Tuesday November 11, 2025
Veterans Day















Mentor Mentee Favorites

A Conversation with Olivia, Ruby & Mabel



The Mentor-Mentee program at Lake Country pairs Children's House learners with Elementary 2 students, as well Elementary 1 children with Junior High adolescents. The mentors and mentees build lasting connections throughout the year through classroom visits, assemblies, activities, and trips to the Land School. Here, Junior High mentor, Olivia, and her Elementary 1 mentees, Ruby and Mabel from Class C, discuss some of their favorite things at LCS.

Thing About LCS

Olivia: The Land School and all of the trips are really special

Ruby + Mabel: Going to the Research Center, art class, cooking projects, all of the fun activities, and our classroom community

Place at LCS

Olivia: The Land School and the Front Office to visit our Receptionist, Megan

Ruby + Mabel: The Land School and the Research Center

LCS Song

Olivia: "Country Roads," "Light a Candle for Peace," and "Common Thread"

Ruby + Mabel: "A Million Dreams," which we sing in Choir

LCS Celebration

Olivia: Wisdom Day and the Winter Assembly

Ruby + Mabel: LCS Gives Week, The Plant Sale, and Field Day

Thing About Your Level

Olivia: All of the trips and opportunities the Junior High get to explore the city, like our Friday Exploration class

Ruby + Mabel: All of the E1 celebrations!

Report or Project You've Done

Olivia: A project in E2 about what World War I and the women's suffrage movement were like in Minnesota

Ruby + Mabel: We did a rabbit report together that was really fun because we got to make a cool slideshow

Montessori Material

Olivia: Metal Insets

Ruby + Mabel: The Cubing Material

Land School Animal

Olivia: All of the chickens and the guinea fowl

Ruby + Mabel: Rheaa the llama and Dottie the dog

Land School Activity

Olivia: Hiking

Ruby + Mabel: Harvesting pumpkins and exploring the ravine

Food Grown or Cooked at the Land School

Olivia: Brussel sprouts and broccoli

Ruby + Mabel: The french toast bake we eat on overnight trips

Wander the Walleye Theory

Olivia: That he lives in a secret pool in the LCS basement

Ruby + Mabel: That he's a regular person who we haven't figured out yet. We think he's either Harrison [Development Coordinator] or Noah [Facilities Manager]

Thing About Having a Mentor/Mentee

Olivia: I love that I get to set a good example and be a good model for my mentees

Ruby + Mabel: It's nice that a mentor is someone to spend time with, especially at assemblies, and also a Junior High student that you actually get to know beyond just seeing them in the hallway

Image L-R: Ruby, Olivia, Mabel

Odyssey South







Writing as Samuel Clemens

Teagan

I wake up at 5:50 AM, already filled with energy. I am Sam Clemens, an eleven year old boy who lives in Hannibal, Missouri. The year is 1846. Even though I'm so bright and energetic on the outside, I sometimes feel dark and gloomy on the inside. That's because my father passed away just a few months ago. My mother has said that she thinks that sadness is manifesting itself as a whole lot of mischief, but I don't know what she's talking about! I walk down the stairs to get breakfast, a piece of untoasted bread and a spoonful of beans. My family's been dirt poor since my dad died. My mom does laundry and boards people in an upstairs room, but that barely makes ends meet. We're too poor to have slaves, so we do the chores ourselves. I get my shoes on and make myself a sandwich and head out the door for another day of playing with my friends, stealing pies off of windowsills, and being the mischievous boy I am.

Writing as a Vicksburg Union Soldier

Eli

"When I come back, the people will be honoring me, and singing about my deeds." Those were the last words I said to my mother. As the explosives rained down on us, those words flashed through my mind.

It was the Civil War, at the battle of Vicksburg. It was a bloody battle, and it wasn't going great for us. After we got another message from Major Grant, we were happy. As we read it, we got even more excited, as it would change the battle forever. If it didn't allow us to kill the Confederates in their base, it would let them know how close we were to them. We were all a little cheered by this, as we expected things to work, and we were desperate.

The plan was to dig under their base, as they had the high ground, and surprise attack them. As we dug, suspense fell upon us. No one talked. As we finally finished digging, a surprise attack was launched on our group. Everyone was caught off guard as we heard one man yell, "For the Confederacy!"

These journal entries were written by Junior High students during Odyssey South 2025.

Ocean Springs, Mississippi

Darby

My time in Ocean Springs has been so valuable and informative, and I'm so sad to go. All week, we've been having interesting lessons, fun days at the beach (which were educational), and we had a really good teacher in my group. Her name was Miss Kelsey and she was nice, funny, and smart. Another thing I'm gonna miss is the scenery because every day we would come back from the classroom and it would be so pretty. The sun would be setting and it was amazing. We also went to the beach yesterday and you could see the sun rays peeking out from the clouds. It looked like a painting!

Community

Bea

This Odyssey has been eventful, both in what we have learned and what has been going on, in and outside our community. Towards the beginning, we struggled quite a bit with mixing, yet observing the seating arrangements today, you realize that it's not really hard to do, and you can discover just how awesome these people are.

A moment that particularly stands out is the night Liam read his journal. We have some great authors and writers this year, but his entry stood out. It touched on feelings that we all experienced in some way after the Annunciation shooting. It let us release our feelings and showed that we all needed to heal from that event. Our past few days had been hard in general, learning about horrible and unjust things in our history. As more people began to cry, it opened room for healing and/or comfort through words and hugs, whether we were friends or not. I am really grateful that Liam was brave enough to put forth his emotions in a journal entry. It helped our community to grow together and to release our emotions. After talking about everything and getting hugs and comfort from people I had barely spoken to before, it made mixing so much easier, and let me know that in times of struggle, our community is able to stand together and work through hard things. I'm really glad that this is our community for the year!

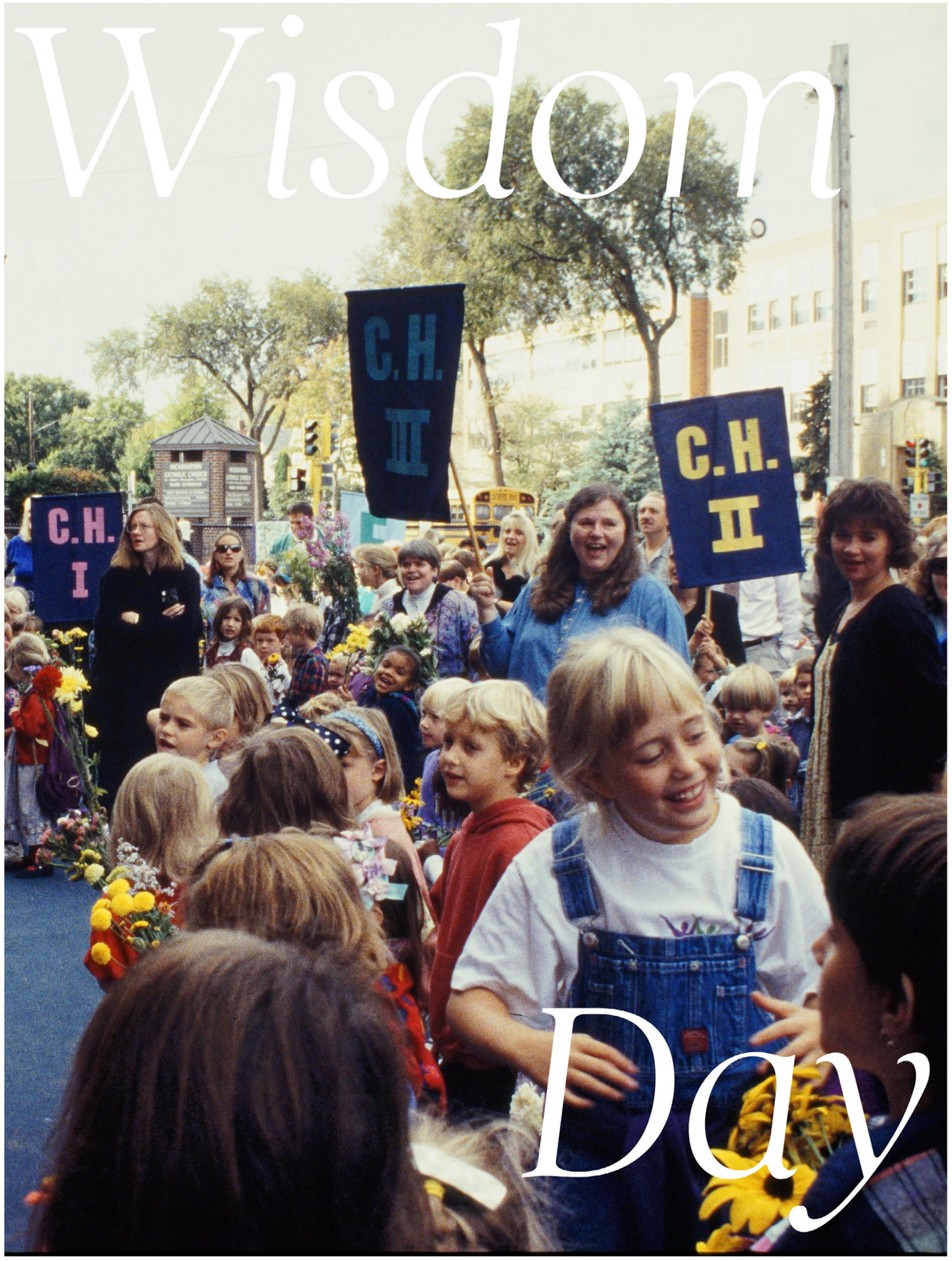
Major stops on the trip included: the homes of Mark Twain and Ulysses S. Grant, Trail of Tears State Park, Vicksburg Civil War Park, Gulf Coast Research Lab, New Orleans, the Civil Rights Institute, and Mammoth Cave.







Wisdom Day



The history of Wisdom Day at Lake Country School began in 1987 as part of a cultural exchange with Moscow School No. 31

By Peggy McKenna

It all started with a chance conversation on an airplane. Some forty years ago, Lake Country School co-founder, Pat Schaefer, struck up a conversation with the woman seated next to her. Once the introductions were complete, the excited imagining and brainstorming began. Pat was seated next to Paula DeCosse, the co-founder of CONNECT US-USSR, a Minnesota non-profit created in the 1980s to develop and facilitate grassroots cultural exchanges between the people of these two Cold War countries.

During their flight, Pat and Paula developed the framework for a cultural exchange between LCS and Moscow School No. 31. The plan was to follow a group of children over the course of three years and to focus the exchange on sharing holidays celebrated in each country to develop cross-cultural understanding and appreciation for a commonly shared value of tradition.

In the first year of the exchange, students in each country worked to select three holidays to share. In 1987-88, sixth grade students in E2 decided to share Halloween, Thanksgiving, and Valentine's Day. The E2 students then helped to write instructions on how to celebrate each holiday and collected items that could be used to celebrate them. Likewise, the students in Liudmila Kalabovnikova's class in Moscow did the same.

In the second year of the exchange, 1988-89, the LCS exchange cohort entered Junior High as 7th graders. Using the materials they'd received, Lake Country students and faculty had to work quickly, since the first holiday sent from the Russian students was Wisdom Day. It is an annual holiday on September 1st, their first day of school. It was established to honor the vital importance of learning and knowledge and the universal right to education. On this day in the Soviet Union, students arrived at school with flowers for their teachers. There were speeches from school leaders and the first graders were escorted into school on the shoulders of the oldest students.

The first Wisdom Day celebration at LCS commenced that year when the Junior High students returned from the Odyssey. The school grounds were decorated with handmade American and Soviet flags and banners with the words "Peace to the World" in Russian. Larry Schaefer, LCS co-founder and Junior High Director, then gave a speech signifying the shared importance of education in both the United States and the Soviet Union.

The third and final year of the exchange, 1989-1990, saw the LCS students in their final year at LCS. The culminating plan for the year was for students from each school to visit the other and to create a new, shared holiday together. In March 1990, Larry Schaefer and I traveled with ten 8th graders to Moscow over spring break. In this period of "glasnost" ("openness") we were given the unprecedented experience of home-stays with Russian families, as well as visits to Moscow School No. 31.

In mid-May 1990, several students from Moscow School No. 31 came to Minneapolis and stayed with LCS families. While here, the 8th graders worked with the Russian students to create a new holiday which they called Future's Day. The central theme of the holiday was working together for a peaceful future. LCS has since incorporated the values of Future's Day into our annual UN Assembly.

In the context of the Cold-War-era-1980s, this unique grassroots cultural exchange provided LCS and Russian students, faculty, and families opportunities to move beyond political rhetoric and get to know more about the other country's people and culture. Cross-cultural study and understanding through personal connections has long been a value of Lake Country School. It is a vital part of Montessori education, for as Maria Montessori explained in *Education and Peace*, "Preventing conflicts is the work of politics; establishing peace is the work of education… our principal concern must be to educate humanity— the human beings of all nations— in order to guide it toward seeking common goals."

Image of Lake Country School's Wisdom Day celebration, circa 1995.



A Year at the Land School

At the Lake Country Land School, learning springs from the land itself— nurtured by soil, sun, and the spirit of exploration.

Children don't just observe the world here, they shape it.

They take initiative—planting, building, caring, and questioning — driven by wonder and a deep sense of purpose.

Each day, they engage with the rhythms of nature and the responsibilities of community, growing into thoughtful stewards of the earth.

On this land, children discover not only the world around them, but their own power to contribute, to connect, and to lead.

On this land, children come to know themselves as creative, capable, connected, and responsible beings.

Andy Gaertner, Land School Guide & Garden Manager, plants with an Elementary 1 student at the Land School.



JAN.

CH: Land School faculty visit classrooms

E1 + E2: Wednesday “Going Out” trips

E1 + E2: Independently planned small group overnights

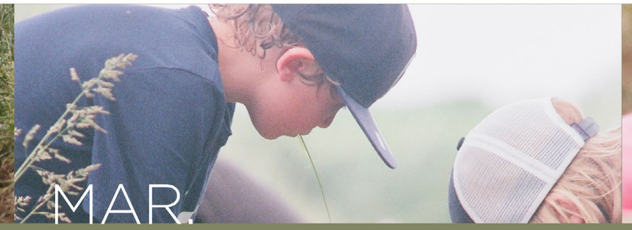


FEB.

E1: Third Grade Overnight (2 days)

E1 + E2: Wednesday “Going Out” trips

JH: Farm Stay 3 begins (19 days)



MAR.

CH: Land School faculty visit classrooms

E1 + E2: Wednesday “Going Out” trips

JH: Farm Stay 3 continues (19 days)



APR.

E1 + E2: Wednesday “Going Out” trips

JH: Farm Stay 4 begins (19 days)



MAY

All School: Plants and produce brought to Urban Campus for Plant Sale

E1: Class C and Class D Overnight Stays (3 days)

E2: Each class visits (1 day)

JH: Farm Stay 4 continues (19 days)



JUN.

All School: Summer Work Day #1

E1: Class E Overnight Stay (3 days)

E2: Farm Camp for incoming 4th-6th graders (5 days)

JH: Apprenticeship for incoming 7th-8th graders (5 days)



JUL.

All School: Summer Work Day #2

All School: Garlic Harvesting Festival

JH: Apprenticeship for incoming 7th-8th graders (5 days)



AUG.

All School: Summer Work Day #3

E2: Farm Camp for incoming 4th-6th graders (5 days)

Faculty + Staff: Start of year retreat



SEP.

All School: Produce brought to Urban Campus Farmers Market

E1: Orientation visit for each class (1 day)

E2: Visit for each class to prepare for 3-Day Stay (1 day)

E1 + E2: Wednesday “Going Out” trips begin

E2: Class F Overnight Stay (3 days)



OCT.

All School: Produce brought to Urban Campus Farmers Market

All School: Harvest Festival

E1 + E2: Wednesday “Going Out” trips

E2: Class G Overnight Stay (3 days)

JH: Farm Stay 1 begins (19 days)



NOV.

All School: Festival de Maiz

CH: Land School faculty visit classrooms

E1 + E2: Wednesday “Going Out” trips

E2: Class H Overnight Stay (3 days)

JH: Farm Stay 1 continues (19 days)

JH: Small group visits to assemble Harvest Baskets (1 day)



DEC.

E1 + E2: Wednesday “Going Out” trips

JH: Farm Stay 2 begins (19 days)

“When you love one place, that builds your love-of-earth muscle, and then you can love the whole earth. This is one of the places that these children get to call their own, and they can love that place.”

— Andy Gaertner, Land School Guide & Garden Manager

“I tell the students that this is your farm and it always will be. The Land School is for everybody at Lake Country School, and you will always have a place here.”

— Doug Alecci, Land School Naturalist

Advancing the Lake Country Mission

By Harrison McLean & Nancy Segreti

Lake Country has enjoyed a sensational start to the 2025-26 school year, filled with gifts in all forms from many corners of our community. Current students, families, alumni, grandparents, and staff members have all had a hand in supporting the LCS Annual Fund, the greatest source of unrestricted funds that supports everything we do at LCS, including tuition assistance, faculty compensation, and equity, diversity, and justice programming. From the grandest spectacle of this year's record-breaking Great Great Gathering, to the smallest acts of kindness that make it all possible behind the scenes, we are deeply grateful to everyone who has helped us reach our goals. Our donors remind us of the power and meaning of giving, in its many forms.

Time

Emily Dingmann & Richie Delmore

Parents of Demi (E2, Class F) & Eden (E1, Class D)

If you've ever been to a Lake Country event, current parents Emily Dingmann & Richie Delmore likely provided invaluable support to make it possible. Whether it's bringing donuts to Bike/Walk/Roll to School Day, chaperoning an overnight trip to the Land School, or slinging bottles at the Bottle Pull the night of the Great Great Gathering, Emily and Richie embody the invaluable spirit of stepping up to be an LCS volunteer.

"I love volunteering because I value the community, and I like to know the kids and their families who are growing up alongside mine."

— Emily Dingmann



L-R: Eden, Emily, Demi, and Richie

"Bike/Walk/Roll is a really easy way to get involved, and it's a really fun day; everyone loves to see doughnuts and coffee. Another one of my favorite ways to volunteer is chaperoning trips to the Land School because that outdoor space is such a gift, and selfishly, I love spending time out there!"

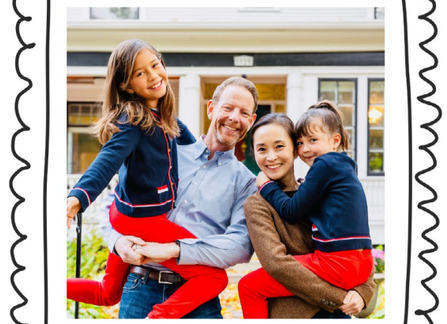
— Emily Dingmann

Treasure

Ryan & Soo Hemmingsen

Parents of Isla (E2, Class H) & Catherine (E1, Class C)

Ryan, Soo, and their daughters, Isla and Catherine live on a short block in Minneapolis where LCS pride is easy to spot. There are young families whose children are just beginning Children's House, recent Junior High graduates, and even parents whose children attended LCS nearly 20 years ago. It was this shared sense of community that drew the Hemmingsen family to LCS in 2021, and since then they have found lasting friendships with other LCS families and meaningful ways to share their Korean culture, as well as opportunities to give back to the LCS community through financial gifts to the LCS Annual Fund.



L-R: Isla, Ryan, Soo, and Catherine

"Like many parents, there is little more important to us than our children's education. We appreciate how thoughtfully LCS works to deliver a high-quality educational experience within the realities of a fixed budget and limited time."

— Ryan & Soo Hemmingsen

"As the saying goes, 'It takes a village,' and we are deeply thankful for the strong, supportive network of LCS parents who have helped make this parenting journey feel more connected, supported, and joyful."

— Ryan & Soo Hemmingsen

Talent

Annie Goodman, Genevieve Hall & Leah Monson

Parents of Gideon (CH2), Scout (E1, Class D) & Wellan (E2, Class H)

The buzz around this year's record-breaking Great Great Gathering was tremendous, thanks in large part to the aptly-named Decorations & Vibes Committee. These three current parents and committee members dedicated their creative energies and talents to transform our gymnasium into a spectacular 90s-themed paradise, complete with hand-painted murals, sparkling centerpieces, Wayne and Garth scarecrows, and more star lights than you can count.



L-R: Genevieve, Leah, and Annie

"I think it's important to show our kids what being involved in your community looks like. They spend so much of their time at school with their teachers and friends. For them to see you taking an interest and spending time where they spend time is really special."

— Annie Goodman

"The Great Great Gathering ingeniously builds community and connection while generating essential funds for the school, and I'm enthusiastic about supporting those efforts through my creative skills."

— Leah Monson

"I would genuinely do anything for this place. We treasure LCS! It's woven right into our lives and giving back in this way feels like the most natural thing in the world."

— Genevieve Hall

Raven Bellefleur

LCS Class of 2011

"I couldn't afford to not go here"

In October 2025, filmmaker and Lake Country School alumni parent, Renny McCauley documented LCS alum, Raven Bellefleur's reflections on her Lake Country experience. The short film was presented at this year's Great Great Gathering, with excerpts transcribed here.

Formative Family

For Raven, it was "the relationships you build with your teachers" that were the most important. "By being in the same room with them for three years and being in a classroom with other kids all day, every day— you become a family. And sometimes when you're in the family, you don't realize it's as formative and impactful until you step away from it."

"The teachers here take their incredible expertise and build a classroom with all these dynamic personalities so that we can learn from one another. [They] were such a safe space. Being at home sometimes felt a little volatile, especially during the recession. There were a lot of changes that were happening, but this was always the same. [This] will always be a loving place where somebody saw me and understood me."

Lifelong Lessons

"Fostering curiosity and compassion is a huge component of the Lake Country education. I find myself being incredibly curious about the world around me. Then, underneath the curiosity is all this compassion for understanding that people are different. It causes me to ask questions about people, [...] even if it's coming from a difference between us. I don't think there's a single day in which that curiosity and compassion are not helpful, and make me enjoy and appreciate life."

Current Connections

"When I come back to Lake Country, there's some inner child in me that lets go and just cries, because there are so many memories. It all [...] connects for me [now]. How important [this] whole experience was."

Raven currently works at Blu Dot, a modern furniture company in Minneapolis and teaches horseback riding. One of her current students is LCS 2nd grader, Frannie, whose parents discovered LCS on Raven's recommendation.

In addition to her visits to the Urban Campus and Land School, Raven is also a member of LCS's 50th Anniversary Steering Committee.

The Alumni Spotlight section of the LCS Courier profiles an alum who reflects on how their LCS education has informed their life and worldview.













A Butter Sweet Goodbye



After 20 years, Dan Swenson-Klatt, owner of Butter Bakery Cafe, has retired. He reflects on working in Kingfield, connections to LCS, and what the future holds.

The start of a new year signifies many things: a fresh start, new beginnings, and renewed hope for the future. On January 1st, 2005, all were true for Dan Swenson-Klatt, a recently retired sixth through eighth grade teacher. For Dan was about to embark on a new adventure... owning a bakery.

While both living and working in Kingfield, Dan's customers and neighbors became one in the same. So much so that his dual citizen/business-owner perspective was sought out by both the Kingfield and Lyndale neighborhood boards, leading to his work with several neighborhood organizations. With so many Kingfield connections, when the space on 3700 Nicollet Ave. became available in October 2012, Dan was offered and accepted the new space without hesitation. And when he did, Lake Country students were there to help with his moving party—a parade of boxes and carts down Grand Ave.

Recalling experiences working with local businesses as a teacher and now being on the other side, it was important to Dan that he nurture relationships with schools near Butter, Lake Country included. So as LCS teachers began to frequent the bakery, he made sure to let them know that they could ask him for anything. And if there's one thing Lake Country loves, it's working with our community. So with his offer taken with great enthusiasm, Lake Country sought out Butter to enrich every sort of gathering, from cookies and cakes for the Junior High Interim cast parties and hot cocoa during LCS Gives Week to meals for faculty & staff and the post-Graduation celebration.

Over twenty years, not only has Dan seen the many faces of Lake Country, he's had a front row seat to the magic of the Kingfield neighborhood. When asked to describe Kingfield in three words, Dan's response was, "Creative, green, and loyal. That's how it feels here. The people care a lot about their neighborhood. [They] look out for each other, [take] care of each other, and [stand] up for each other. I think we've tried to be a good model for that."

In addition to Dan's extensive effort to live his values by being a sustainable, eco-conscious business owner, as well as an advocate for workplace conditions across Minneapolis, it wouldn't be Dan's Butter if the business wasn't also doing something to help the people right next door... or, upstairs.

When Butter moved into its Nicollet location, Dan built a relationship with the community of young people living above his shop. The housing above Butter is designed intentionally for young people exiting homelessness or the foster care system to offer them support, guidance, and long-term stability as they transition into adulthood. Dan was quick to support the program, hiring many residents to work at Butter, providing them with training and opportunities to feel more confident as members of the workforce.

With the high level of community engagement and advocacy Butter has been involved in, when looking for a new owner, Dan has worked hard to make sure they continue his original mission. While the transition of ownership is not public knowledge at the time of publication, Dan is adamant that whoever the new owner is will keep Butter a comfortable and familiar place for all who work and visit. When asked about his hopes for Butter's future, Dan's answer was simply, "I want Butter to be a friendly neighborhood place that keeps finding new ways to help its neighborhood to be the creative place it is."

And while Butter moves forward, so does Dan. His official last day was December 31st. Having purchased the shop on New Years Day, twenty years ago, his retirement truly feels full circle. And in the New Year's spirit of new beginnings and hope for the future, Dan isn't quite sure what he'll do next. Currently, his plan is to make himself "available for many adventures," one of which he says is "volunteering at schools." So who knows what's to come... he says he'd "love to go to the Land School."

The Kingfield Connections section of the LCS Courier profiles a person or business in the Kingfield neighborhood with connections to LCS.

Summer at LCS

Grades K–4

Learn More &
Register Here

At Lake Country School, summer isn't just a season—it's a chance for children to grow, explore, and thrive. Our weekly themed camps for children Kindergarten through 4th grade are thoughtfully designed for curious minds, adventurous spirits, and a growing sense of independence.

Camp Wander



Shop Lake Country's newest selection of merch, including t-shirts, crewnecks, sweatpants, and a variety of accessories.

LCS Merch

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Wine born and handcrafted in California, aged in Napa, and carefully tended by passionate people.

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A real estate investment firm committed to providing exceptional living experiences to residents and superior returns to investors.

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marketstreetdermatology.com

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vitalfitnessmn.com

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Discover thousands of new and used cars for sale in Minnesota. Experience hassle-free car selling and a seamless car buying journey.

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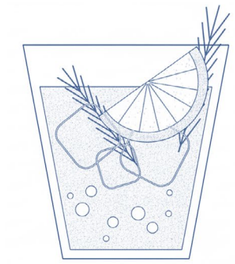
Thank you to our Great Great Gathering sponsors who helped contribute to the success of the evening. If you would like to support Lake Country School and highlight your business in the next edition of the Courier, please reach out to development@lakecountryschool.org.

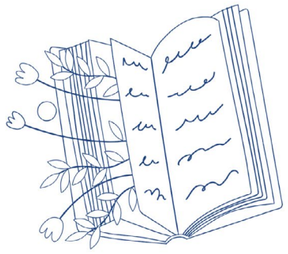
Upcoming Events at LCS



Alumni Happy Hour

March 3
5:00 - 7:00 PM

Alumni (21+) are invited to join us for a special social gathering to learn more about exciting things on the horizon for Lake Country School. Hosted by Dorothy Baker ‘04 and Harrison McLean ‘06 at La Doña Cervecería Brewery.



Parent/Caregiver Education Event: Language + Literacy at LCS

March 5
4:30 - 6:00 PM

This event will begin with an overview of language and literacy from Children’s House through Junior High, followed by opportunities to explore materials at each level. This is one of the best opportunities to hear from guides at each level about language and literacy in a Montessori environment.



LCS Gives Week

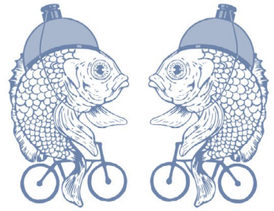
March 8 - 14

LCS Gives Week is about coming together as a community to support the school that gives us so much. It’s a concentrated effort to reach our LCS Annual Fund goals, all while having some fun along the way. From events and festivities throughout the week to everyone’s favorite LCS socks, we hope you’ll join us in the festivities and support the week any way you can!

Bike, Walk, Roll to School Day

April 28

Looking for a more environmentally friendly way to get to school? Bike, roll, or walk to school and enjoy delicious snacks, warm coffee, and good company, including Wander the Walleye!



E2 Play Performance

April 30
4:30 PM

Come see the stories E2 students have written come to life, the costumes and props they’ve designed, and the performances they’ve honed over this month-long endeavor.



The Plant Sale

May 7 & 8

This beloved LCS tradition is not only the best way to stock your gardens for the spring, but it is also a beloved social and fundraising event, with all proceeds supporting LCS programming.

We source organically grown vegetables, herbs, and flowers planted at our Land School, as well as plants and flowers native to Minnesota grown locally and organically by Glacial Ridge.

Pre-orders open in March and remain open until the week of the sale.



Junior High Bike Trip

June 1 - 5

As a culmination and celebration of their year together, the Junior High will embark on their annual 100-mile Bike Trip.

If you are an alum who is interested in chaperoning the trip, we would love to hear from you. Please email employment@lakecountryschool.org.



8th Grade Graduation

June 8
5:30 - 7:00 PM

Our celebration of graduation will feature speeches from graduates, tributes from 7th grade students, an alumni speaker, and classic LCS songs.



The 2026-2027
school year marks the

50th Anniversary of Lake Country School

and the

30th Anniversary of The Land School

Save the Date

May 21, 2027
Urban Campus Celebration

May 22, 2027
Land School Celebration

Follow us on social media
@lakecountryschool for future updates



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