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LITTLE RIVER COMMUNITY SCHOOL

Little River News

Celebrating 25 Years

Little River will complete its 25th year this spring having served over 253 students and their families including 28 high school graduates.

We say this with calm satisfaction. For all the work it is to run a three-ring circus, it is full of joy and loving connections.

In 1998, a much-loved, slightly run-down portable classroom was loaded on a truck at Clonlara School in Ann Arbor, Michigan to begin its new life 500 miles away as Little River Community School. The building was actually in rough shape, very rough. The roof and siding had to be replaced, revealing much

of the rotting structure that had to be replaced. So much of the building was renewed or replaced that we can jokingly say only the floor plan

our twenty-fifth anniversary and look back at some of the highlights.

Getting Ready

Founder Steve Molnar has had a passion for teaching since his first experience working with kids as a twenty-year-old when he interned at the Goodman Free School in Lansing, MI, and went on to become a teacher there. He has maintained a vision of a school that has a fundamental trust in children and their inherent motivation to learn about their world. It took a lot of planning and the stars aligned to have enough momentum to begin.

Birdsfoot Farm was the right place to support that. Steve's son, Sebastian, was soon to be five-years-old,



First year students, circa 2000

was left. On opening day in 1999, we had four students, ages 5-8, with one teacher and an intern. By the end of that first year, we had twelve students and eventually grew to 39. It is time to celebrate

Class of 2024

After a year without any seniors, we are proud to announce that the Class of 2024 consists of four seniors who will graduate on May 12, 2024. This year's class includes Maddie Hansen-Schreiber, Elias Nelson, Nico Petroccione, and Toby Cannamela.

Maddie came to Little River in November of 2013. She was active in the Climate Vigil until it was disrupted by COVID. She completed her senior internship

at a food bank in South Carolina, where she learned the challenges of distributing thousands of pounds of food to people in need. She took four courses at St. Lawrence University as a senior and has signed on with a modeling agency. She plans to start college in the fall. Maddie has applied to UCLA, Occidental College, and University of Redlands, and Vassar.

Elias joined the Little Riv-

er community in September of 2014. As a satellite student, Elias did most of his course work at home, and attended Little River one day a week. He took four courses at St. Lawrence University during high school. He served as a TA for Introduction to Philosophy at St. Lawrence for his senior internship, which strengthened his desire to become a teacher. He will attend Haverford

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Have your child come home happy

- Democratic School, K-12
- 8:1 Student/Teacher Ratio
- Individualized Curriculum
- Hands-on Learning
- Satellite Options

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Middles Mummies

The Middles have spent time exploring Ancient Egypt learning about pharaohs, pyramids, polytheism, and MUMMIES. They decided to put the mummification process to the test using baking soda, salt, and a granny smith apple. After carving their apple like a Jack-O-Lantern, the students took measurements of height, weight and width before covering their “mummy” in baking soda and salt. Over

the next weeks, the students revisited and reweighed using a triple beam balance on their apples to see how they changed. The results varied, leaving some apples soggy and rotten and others dried up and more mummified. The Middles loved this hands-on exploration into mummification.

Nuala Woods



Noah's apple mummy

Celebrating 25 Years (continued)



making the timing right to pull it off. The dream became a reality when a portable classroom building Steve taught at in Ann Arbor became available. Then all that was needed to be done was to fix the building up, go through paperwork with the state, and network with interested families.

Early Years

Into the second year of school, it became clear that the size and floor plan of a 20' x 40' portable classroom was not big enough to house our growing enrollment. So, by the 2001 school year, we nearly doubled the footprint of the building and went from being a one-room schoolhouse to having three-

rooms. In those early years we did a lot of activities at Birdsfoot Farm. We used the large Birdsfoot kitchen to bake cookies or pizza. We pressed cider and hiked to Coon Tree Knoll. Dulli Tengeler guided us on the farm with harvesting carrots or planting garlic. We established an annual tradition of having a winter sledding party at Steve's house, where we sled, make hot chocolate and popcorn.

High School

In 2003 we had our first Little River high school graduates, including Bali MacKentley, who is now a mother of

one of the next generation of Little River students. Since then, we have had 28 graduates, most of whom went off to the college of their choice, often with generous scholarships. Many Little River students take college classes at SLU in their junior and senior year through SLU's High School Enrichment Program and six Little River students have taken their senior year at the Clarkson School. Gwen Smith was our first student to have gone from kindergarten through twelfth grade and we have had several others since then. This year we will have four graduates.

Continued Growth

As we grew, we set up three groups for academic studies, affectionately known as Youngers, Middles, and Olders. All of the students come together for morning meetings and play together at breaks. Across the ages, we are a tight group and care for one another.

Ten years ago, we hosted the Northeast Democratic Education Conference at Little River with a committee of students, parents, and staff organizing the logistics and workshops. At the conference, we became close friends with the students at Longview School in Brewster, NY, and had several visits with them.

Over the years our growth continued, slow and steady. Our annual Winterfest has been a great opportunity to meet new families and bring them out to the school to do crafts and activities with our kids

and parents. With the growth, we were faced with the challenge of having to turn families away due to a lack of space. So, in 2013, we completed another major building project doubling the size of the building again. The space we have now is very comfortable with four classrooms, two smaller rooms for tutoring, a large community space, a small kitchen, two bathrooms, and an office. It has a more thoughtful floor plan and we no longer have to walk through someone else's class to go to the bathroom or go outside.

COVID Years

Except for the first two months of lockdown, Little River kept its doors, or shall we say tent flaps, open for in-person learning for the entire pandemic. We spent most of two years outside in four 20' x 20' tents, coming in during the winter with open windows. We managed and thrived during this period, and we problem-solved to keep each other safe. No students contracted COVID at school.

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Steve with a group of students

Black American Projects

The students in the Middles were inspired to research important black Americans after Heather and Barrett shared a personal project outlining the *ABC's of Black History* by Rio Cortez. Their presentation highlighted the information outlined in Cortez's book and discussed Martin Luther King Jr. and Harriett Tubman's impact in black history and the civil rights movement. After viewing the presentation, the students expressed interest in creating their own presentations and researching someone of their choosing. Some



Simone Biles, by Remi

students had someone on their mind, but many used an Andscape.com article titled *The Undeclared: 44 African Americans Who Shook Up the World* to choose the person to research. Students created slide show presentations researching information about their biography, their career, their families and what they are well known for. They also dedicated a slide to explain why they chose this person to research. In addition to the slide show each student created a portrait of their prominent black American using a medium of their choosing.

The Middles presented on authors such as Zora Neale Hurston and Maya Angelou, musicians like Prince and Quincy Jones, athletes such as Serena Williams

and Mike Grier, and politicians Shirley Chisolm. This project allowed for variety and excitement in exploring history and the black Americans who have impacted and continue to impact our world today.

Nuala Woods



Serena Williams, by Ira

Class of 2024 (continued)

College in the fall to study philosophy and classics.

Nico started at Little River in September of 2015. He is a competitive gamer, travelling to Rochester, Detroit, and San Jose to participate in *Super Smash Bros. Melee tournaments*. Nico's internship included working for the Potsdam Central School District IT department and a local thrift shop. He intends to start college this fall, and is deciding where he wants to go. He has been accepted at SUNY Potsdam, Clark University and the University of Buffalo. Nico plans to major in business

administration.

Toby came to Little River in the spring of 2022. He took a class at St. Lawrence as a senior, and worked in the costume shop for a community production of "The Addams Family" for his internship. Toby will start at SUNY Potsdam in the

fall, and he intends to study art, but is open to other ideas.

Congratulations to the Little River Community School Class of 2024. It has been a joy working with you. We look forward to hearing tales of your adventures and successes.

Leon Sawyko

Celebrating (continued)

Time to Celebrate

As we come upon our 25th birthday we want to appreciate the dedicated teachers, the parents who have chosen and supported the school, and the kids, all 253 of them. The kids are what makes this school special. They have a lot of say in what goes on here and in designing their own curriculum. They facilitate meetings and solve problems, and kids of all ages care for one another. They built the playground, barn, and swing set, and put up the climbing wall. They plant flowers and veggies and play in the woods. They develop academic, thinking, and problem-solving skills, and learn how to apply them. For all of this we have reason to celebrate.

Steve Molnar



Dulli, Steve, and Seba before the school opened



Vivian learning to read

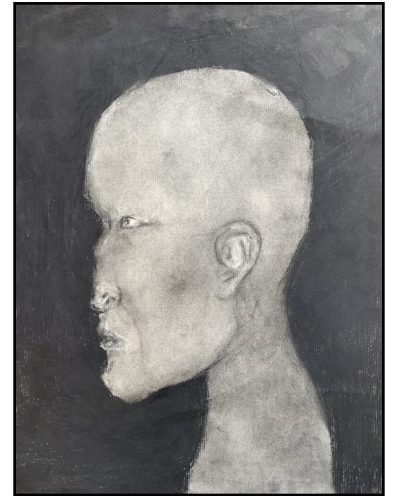
Thank You

Tom Van de Water for subbing three days in the Olders room; **Eric Williams-Bergen** for work on our website; **Anna Sommer** and **Pete Pettengill** for preparing our Authors parties in the Youngers room; the **Potsdam Library** for hosting the Olders art exhibit; **Maren Wolfe** for volunteering regularly in the Middles room and spearheading a drama class; **Dulli Tengeler** for facilitating garden projects on Birdsfoot Farm; **Rivka Eckert** for helping with the Middles drama project; **Aubree Keese** for six years of teaching service to Little River; **Josh Akins** for trucking hay to the school; **Elizabeth Becht** for reviewing our immunization records and overseeing book orders; and **Esta Tovstiadi** and **Emily Dixon** for serving on our building committee.

This Is How You Tell It Is Spring

by Liam Quicke

The flowers are blooming
 The imagination is flowing
 The trees are swaying
 The water is crackling
 The wind is low and steady
 The stars are gleaming at night
 The grass is green and warm
 This is how you tell it is spring.



Fredrick by Lidija Aldous

Matching Grant Challenge

As Little River Community School reaches its 25th anniversary, we wanted to make this \$10,000 donation to support the school in overcoming its big challenge - recruiting and retaining the incredible staff that make the school the inclusive, welcoming, and engaging place it is. Our teachers make approximately sixty percent of a public-school teacher. We are excited to announce this donation to encourage matching gifts from other members of the Little River community to help support a bonus for staff. Any amount, no matter how modest, helps. Donations can be sent to LRCS, 1227 CR 25, Canton, NY 13617.

Anonymous Donor

Have your child come home happy!

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