

BEHIND THE SCENES: Keeping West Side Montessori School Safe and Effective

Most people who visit WSMS probably do not pay a lot of attention to the facilities. The atmosphere is bright, clean and cheerful ... there are no distractions caused by dirt or marks on the walls indicating the need for a paint job, strange smells (at least most of the time), or unusual mechanical noises. For this we are grateful to Amy Stoney, Director of Operations, and Shawn Cumberbatch, Facilities Manager.

What visitors don't realize is how much goes on behind the scenes and all through the year.

OUR FACILITIES

WSMS bought the double brownstone at 309 West 92nd Street in 1974 from the Calhoun School. Over the years there have been many upgrades and renovations, and the building currently has eight classrooms for children, bathrooms on every level, a full-service kitchen, the library/parents' room on the first floor, a gym/adult classroom on the fifth floor, outdoor play space on the roof, and office space on multiple levels.

This year we rented and renovated basement space from the Annunciation Greek Orthodox Church, at 91st Street and West End Avenue, to provide two dedicated classrooms and office space for our thriving Twos Program and WSMS-TEP.

Because every space is utilized every day, the regular daily schedule includes afterschool cleaning of classrooms/gym/offices/restrooms ... mopping floors, wiping off furniture, sanitizing the kitchen and bathrooms.

On Tuesdays and Thursdays, the TEP/Concordia classes take place in the gym, so Shawn's staff is charged with turning the children's play space into an adult learning center in the late afternoon, then re-configuring it for the kids when the adult classes are over.

The same thing happens on Friday, in the gym and also in the Twos classrooms at the Church, for Saturday TEP classes.

Amy and Shawn also work hand-in-hand with Nikki Chase-Levin and the Parents Association to be sure that facilities are ready for the many events that happen at WSMS.

EVERY FEW MONTHS ...

There is a substantial amount of ongoing maintenance that takes place on a regular basis over the course of the year and has to be fitted into strategic timing—days off, weekends, and early closings:

- all the carpeting is shampooed and the non-carpeted flooring is heavy-



cleaned and polished every few months

- at least once a year the laminate classroom flooring is stripped and polished
- every three months the kitchen appliances are serviced and the grease trap is cleaned (this needs to be done when the school is empty since it is an unpleasant event!)

A HECTIC SUMMER

There are always one-time projects to be accomplished, and for the most part those are scheduled in the summer, when camp occupies only two or three of the eight classrooms and there are far fewer adults around.

This summer's big projects—aside from the renovation of the Church for the Twos—were:

- installing a new state-of-the-art fire alarm system, inspected and certified by the NYFD, which required running conduit at the rear of the building wired to every classroom (Shawn cleverly realized this was much more efficient than indoor wiring)
- moving all TEP documents and other materials to the Church (where classes were/are held), creating storage opportunities on the fifth floor
- replacing flooring/carpeting in the Garden class and Teachers' Room in

- response to flooding damage
- replacing carpet in all other classrooms and on the stairs (this is usually done every two years)
- replacing laminate with tile in all bathrooms to ensure the floors are waterproof and to enhance cleaning
- fitting all fire escape doors with external key access (before they could only be opened from the inside with a push bar)
- an external power wash, followed by patching/painting the exterior where necessary

SAFETY

For obvious reasons safety is our highest priority. Our daily maintenance ensures that our facilities are sanitary, that children do not have access to anything that could cause them harm, that our passageways are not obstructed, that steps and sidewalks are not slippery in bad weather, and—critically—that the school can be emptied rapidly in case of fire or other emergencies.

Fire drills are critical to school safety. Starting that classroom training is one of the first things teachers do in the fall; the loud noise and strobe lights (part of the new system) in every classroom

could be highly upsetting if the children were blindsided by them. We schedule two drills/month, monitored by the New York City Fire Department to ensure timely evacuation to safe locations, and there are always several drills each year where faculty are not given advance notice to ensure that they are not complacent in responding.

BUT WE ARE NOT FINISHED ...

Having accomplished all this doesn't mean there is not more to be done in the future. Amy and Shawn are currently contemplating:

- painting the doors and the lobby
- dealing preventatively with winter ice accumulation on the façade, which has previously been addressed by installing special heaters

Ensuring that our children have the best possible place to start their educational journeys means that we have to be thinking ahead and exploring alternatives.

As Mimi says, “Both Shawn and Amy have an incredible ‘can do’ attitude.” WSMS is lucky to have Amy and Shawn on the job.



AMY AND SHAWN

Amy Stoney joined WSMS in the fall of 2014 as a part-time receptionist and quickly progressed to a full-time member of the admin team. With a hand in many different aspects of the daily operations of WSMS, it seemed a natural progression when she took over the position of Director of Operations in 2017. Amy is still involved in much of the administrative work, but also oversees the kitchen (where she has a strong hand in menu development), facilities and reception staff, and she makes sure classroom teachers have everything they need to do their work. She is a valuable contributor to decisions made regarding building upgrades and construction projects, has been part of the weekly construction meetings since January, and hires and manages the various contractors who do work at school. Before joining WSMS, Amy spent most of her career as nanny or household manager. And in her spare time she has an amazing catering business!

Shawn Cumberbatch joined WSMS in the spring of 2017. He has worked in the facilities/janitorial industry for many years. In 2008 he started his career in Manhattan private schools, where he ran or worked in the facilities departments of Greenwich House/Barrow Street Nursery School and the Brownstone School. As the Facilities Manager at WSMS, he is responsible for the daily maintenance of the building, DOH/DOB/FDNY compliance, safety of building for students and staff and any emergency facility-related issues.

Shawn has a critical and discerning eye around all safety issues. Most days at arrival and dismissal, he is out on the street in front of the building watching the area as families arrive. Caregivers and parents will leave sleeping babies in strollers with him so they can come in to drop off an older child. Shawn also does impromptu safety drills with individual classrooms, offering safety guidance to teachers.

And, in his spare time, Shawn owns and manages his ever-expanding business, IGT Moving and Cleaning Services, which oversees facilities in five buildings throughout the city and provides other services to clients as needed.