“...WHERE TO BEGIN”
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Dear Friends and Members of the WSMS Community,

Providing a great educational beginning for our young students is the essence of our mission here at West Side Montessori School. It informs how we think, how we talk, and how we work with children and their families. Since WSMS is typically their first formal educational setting, we are very serious about our role in helping each child build a lasting foundation for learning, while acknowledging and supporting the families who have a distinct influence on the process.

Certainly, we are focused on providing children with the skills to develop their small and large motor capacities and their social competencies, but, perhaps even more importantly, we focus on developing attitudes and dispositions that will last a lifetime. We help our young students become Self-Directed Learners, Flexible Thinkers, Creative Problem Solvers, Empathic Citizens, and Resilient Individuals, all in the context of a strong belief in individuality and respect for self and others.

It is thus no accident that this new publication is named *Great Beginnings*. We felt that it was important to communicate to current, past, and future families and supporters the diverse and marvelous stories that collectively construct the WSMS community. *Great Beginnings*, in its Annual Report section, also provides us with a vehicle to show our deep sense of gratitude to those individuals who give of their time, their talent, and their financial support to ensure the longterm viability of this wonderful school.

This fall marks the beginning of my third year as Head of School. Coming back to WSMS as Head after five years as its Associate Director (1995 to 2001) and six years in charge of school accreditation at the American Montessori Society provided me with the opportunity of a lifetime. Faculty and administrators have always expressed pride at being part of this dynamic learning community composed of dedicated and expert professionals. And I was certainly one of them. Yet, even before coming on board, I understood that a strong commitment to continuous improvement was always at the root of longterm success. Although I was very fortunate to take charge of an outstanding school, clearly I understood that it was my responsibility to define specific goals to make this exceptional school an even better place for our young students, our faculty, and our staff.

Last year, we redesigned our Late Afternoon Program (LAP) to provide an exceptional extended day program for our children, and we instituted the “After Lunch Bunch,” a program geared to our 5-year-olds. With the support of faculty, we developed a more meaningful evaluation system. This year, we have beefed up our professional development program with two “visiting scholars” in the areas of positive discipline and music. These experts presented workshops for faculty in early September and will be available to help teachers implement their new learning in the classroom.

I am most fortunate to work with a wonderful staff and faculty, and to be supported by an exceptional, hardworking, and caring Board of Trustees. Please enjoy this first edition of *Great Beginnings*, and keep tuned for more wonderful WSMS stories to come.

Mimi Basso
Head of School

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In Memory of Sheila Driscoll

On August 27, 2009, Sheila Driscoll, WSMS Finance Director, lost a three-year battle with ovarian cancer, and WSMS lost a longtime friend, supporter, and employee.

Sheila’s affiliation with WSMS began in 1987 when former Head of School Marlene Barron needed an accountant to help with taxes. Things were simpler then; billing was done by hand, Marlene kept the books. Sheila had a computer, and her accounting practice specialized in non-profit organizations, especially small independent schools. Over time she became an integral part of the school’s financial administration, while also taking on clients such as ISAAGNY, AMS, and WSMS-TEP.

In 2003, when the administrative demands of the new UPK program became clear, Sheila joined WSMS as an employee. She had an uncanny ability to work effectively with government bureaucracy. Valued for her thoroughness, strong sense of ethics, and ability to tie things out to the penny, Sheila was beloved for her sense of humor, her engaging smile, and her kindness. One of seven children in a typical Irish family, Sheila loved politics, and would have been transfixed by the death of Teddy Kennedy (just two days before her own). She loved animals, too, and was always ready to make room for another abandoned cat in her home. As Mimi Basso said, “Sheila was a wonderful asset to WSMS and the ISAAGNY community – she handled our finances impeccably. She was generous with advice and always provided good, commonsense solutions. We will miss her humor and her kindness.”
Dear Friends of West Side Montessori School,

WSMS is a dynamic place that every year produces a long list of accomplishments. In the past two years we have reached two major milestones: we have completed the successful transition to a new Head of School and we have undergone a major renovation and upgrading of our facilities.

We knew that replacing Marlene Barron, our revered and eminent leader of 28 years, would be a challenge. Marlene has a national—no, international—reputation in early childhood education and was instrumental in making WSMS what we are today. In Mimi Basso we have found her ideal successor: a warm and experienced administrator with a creative approach to building on our recognized capabilities and reputation, ensuring that WSMS maintain its leadership role in the dynamic educational field.

Our second major accomplishment was this summer’s extensive renovation, which—providentially—happened on time and within budget! Many thanks to those who gave so generously to “The Campaign for West Side.” Your $1.2 million in capital support enabled us to complete the important task of refurbishing our classroom spaces to state-of-the-art standards. We can now proudly say that our physical facilities are commensurate with our academic ones. Our newly “green” classrooms reflect the use of sustainable materials, modeling for our children the importance of being environmentally aware (and, not coincidentally, requiring less ongoing maintenance). We also completed several important building maintenance and upgrade projects within our annual operating budget. For example, the redesigned kitchen, with double the prep space, allows us to enhance our capacity to serve fresh organic food to our young students and faculty.

This magazine is another accomplishment. Great Beginnings will focus on the culture and the community that are the essence of WSMS. We intend to publish twice a year: the fall issue will include an Annual Report recognizing the many people who support the mission of WSMS. We hope you enjoy reading it and look forward to your feedback.

Finally, we wish to thank our terrific Head of School, Mimi Basso, and the faculty and administrative staff of WSMS, for everything they do to give our children truly “great beginnings.”

Philip Korologos
Parent ’04, ’07
President of the Board of Trustees
2007–2009

Valda Witt
Parent ’04, ’05, ’09
President of the Board of Trustees
2009–
On May 28, in the early evening, almost 30 people with various connections to WSMS gathered in the Parents Room. Three hours later they left, exhilarated by an evening spent brainstorming the school’s political, economic, social, and technological issues (PEST), as well as our strengths and weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT).

The group, led by Board President Valda Witt (parent ’04, ’05, ’09), Consultant for School Advancement Patricia Luciani, and former Board member Tina Connelly (parent ’90, ’96, ’97, ’00), included current and past parents and faculty. Participants brought perspectives from their professional lives as well as experience at ongoing schools.

Small group sessions were followed by an opportunity to explore the collective input. The degree of consensus affirmed the perception of WSMS as a premier early childhood educator with an outstanding faculty and an enviably strong financial basis.

The 2003 Strategic Plan focused on the transition to a new Head of School. Having successfully accomplished that goal, why do a new Strategic Plan now? Because the world continues to change; because WSMS has always been responsive to the needs and interests of the community; because we have new leadership; because we want to leverage our enviable position to ensure our continued stature as an educational innovator and leader.

As a longtime Board member, parent, and former teacher, I was excited to participate in moving WSMS to the next stage. West Side Montessori is a fantastic school—it was a great place for me to start my professional career, as well as a terrific place to begin my children’s academic experience. I’ve watched the school change and adapt over the years, and the fresh perspective that Mimi Basso brings means that will continue. The strategic planning process allows us to implement change through the context of an experienced and knowledgeable core of people who care deeply about WSMS.

The next steps include small group follow-up sessions in September and October to explore opportunities identified in the May meeting, and the preparation of a document for presentation to the Board in December.

–Lisa Kohl
Parent ’05, ’09
Board of Trustees
Former WSMS Teacher
As winter began to frost the rooftop play area at West Side Montessori School and children bundled up against the cold, Christopher Liu was outside with his friends in 4E, playing in the season’s first snowflakes. But while he was enjoying the fresh cold feeling of snow melting on his face, he wondered what it must be like for people his age that were not wrapped in the safety of a nice winter coat.

"It was winter," recalls Christopher, squinting into this morning’s warm June sun, "and people that didn’t have coats were cold." Christopher is taking some time out from shooting a basketball to explain how he came up with the idea that became a revolutionary school-wide coat drive for infants and toddlers.

"Other people had coats," says Christopher, "but they had outgrown them. So I told Natalie [Christopher’s teacher], ‘People need coats, and we should have a coat drive.’"

Natalie suggested Christopher write a letter to Mimi about his idea, and so he wrote the following:

Dear Mimi,

I have an idea. It is getting cold. Lots of kids don’t have coats. What do you say of a coat drive?

Love, Christopher

Mimi loved the idea, and thus began the WSMS winter coat drive.

"I counted [incoming coats] every day and wrote the total on a piece of paper," says Christopher, explaining how he kept track of the overwhelming wave of support for his drive. "People gave coats, hats, mittens, scarves—oh." He pauses for a moment. "Scarf."

"Scarf?" I ask him.

"There was just one scarf," says Christopher. Christopher is quick to point out those who helped him make the coat drive a success. Every morning as children came to school, Christopher would stand with a friend to remind people about the drive.

"Leo [Della Penna] helped me make announcements," he says. "We had a sign up, but we made announcements just in case. Anna, Natalie, and Megan helped too."

When asked if he could put a number on how many coats finally came in, Christopher says, "I don’t remember…a lot—56!"

All donated items from the winter coat drive were given to Baby Buggy, a non-profit organization dedicated to providing New York City’s families in need with essential equipment, books, and clothing for their infants and young children.

I thank Christopher for his time and he says, "You’re welcome. Can I play basketball now?"

*Christopher has since requested the story mention that baseball is actually his favorite sport.
Kate Doyle, the lively two-year-old daughter of Susanna and Boker Doyle, was going to need a nursery school soon. Unfortunately the Doyles had yet to find one that they loved...or that didn’t involve a lengthy commute from their spacious apartment on West 106th Street. So, one fateful night in 1963, they gathered like-minded parents of toddlers around their dinner table and took a giant step.

The Doyles and their dinner guests (Larry and Olivia Huntington, Fritz and Marian Schwarz, Joe and Bay Wasserman, and Gil and Sarah Burke) were pioneering residents of what was considered at the time a risky place to live...but the large apartments at low rents ($196/month for 10 rooms!) attracted individuals who could articulate their needs and were willing to act to implement them. Not for them were the early childhood programs at churches and synagogues where the children seemed submissive to group authority or controlling adults or religious ritual. They wanted their children to have fun, for their first school to have "nice edges."

While on a family trip to Ohio in 1962, the Doyles had been captivated by a visit to a Montessori school founded by a friend. Already familiar with Maria Montessori’s theory of education, Susanna Doyle and Bay Wasserman got to work, visiting Caedmon (brand new) and Whitby (the first Montessori school in the United States, located in Greenwich, CT). This was it: Montessori was "innovative, progressive, and readily adaptable to the diverse needs and lifestyles of families" on the Upper West Side.

The dinner party cemented the commitment of the five couples as partners in the founding of the West Side Montessori School.

It’s easy to say that the West Side Montessori School was an idea waiting to happen in 1963, and indeed the school’s founders were fortuitously positioned to identify and embrace a need and use their skills, talents, and backbone to turn it into the exceptional institution it is today.

To assess interest they posted flyers on lampposts and supermarket bulletin boards, inviting neighbors to a "town meeting"; 150 people showed up, and 60 families were willing to commit to funding the school for the 10 projected spaces. They hired Elizabeth Hopkins, the Montessori-trained Swedish sister-in-law of the Doyles’ Ohio friend, who just happened to be moving to New York. In a few quick months they were affiliated with the American
Montessori Society, licensed by the city, and open for business with 15 students in a room they shared with the Children’s Aid Society on 104th and Columbus. The founders ran the school from Susanna’s kitchen.

The next years were a time of furious growth. By 1972 WSMS had 215 students and 25 teachers, was receiving public funding through the Agency for Child Development, and had 25% of the families receiving financial aid. To accommodate growth in the student body and the addition of afternoon and all-day sessions, WSMS moved to the Young Israel Temple on West 91st Street (where the kosher kitchen complicated lunch menus), to the Parish House of St. Michael’s Church on West 99th Street, and finally in 1974 to our current location.

For the first ten years the original founders did everything: created an application form and went to each child’s home to interview him in his own space; helped parents identify the right next school; hired and fired. One notable addition to the staff was a Mrs. Safier, the “Becky Bonelli” of the day, who could be “quite disagreeable” on the phone!

And WSMS was more than just an exceptional place for children. The founders, longtime friends (from childhood, from college), saw it as a place for adults, too. Initially they limited applications to families living between 66th and 105th Streets so there would be a feeling of neighborhood and parents could get to know each other well. They sponsored lectures on early childhood; one, held at a hotel and set up for 100 attendees, attracted 500 people!

They held street fairs on West 99th Street, and inadvertently held the first Auction as a result. The Doyles once again hosted a dinner to celebrate the day. Confronted with a substantial mound of uneaten hot dogs, Boker had the inspiration to auction them off at the table. Some $200 later, Larry Huntington offered his tie to the highest bidder and raised $300. The next year the first Annual WSMS Auction was formally on the calendar.

The children of the Doyles, Burkes, Wassermans, Hunteings, and Schwarzes moved on from WSMS, and as the school grew explosively, it became clear that professional management was essential. Susanna Doyle left the Board in 1972, quipping that “WSMS will be the only thing on our tombstones.” One could argue that this would be a pretty impressive epitaph.

“West Side Montessori School was an idea waiting to happen in 1963, and indeed the school’s founders were fortuitously positioned to identify and embrace a need and use their skills, talents, and backbone to turn it into the exceptional institution it is today.”

By Tina Connelly, WSMS parent ’90, ’96, ’97, ’00 & former trustee
As is the case with everything at our school, the impetus for the "greening" of West Side Montessori School was the desire to do what’s best for our kids. And the best is what our efforts have yielded: our newly renovated classrooms provide a state-of-the-art early childhood learning environment that is ideal for our young students. They also provide much more! Several years ago, our Board concluded that the best way to support our exceptional faculty and secure our school’s future would be to create classrooms that were in keeping with the excellence of our teaching and our reputation as one of the finest early childhood schools in New York City. We are fortunate to have a beautiful building in which to conduct our work, but our interior space had not been seriously rethought or renovated in a comprehensive way for over 25 years. The Board resolved that our new learning spaces should not only be a model of the best instructional theory and practice, they should also be environmentally and ergonomically sound. WSMS has always taught its children to respect the earth and the environment (did
At the start of our renovation project, therefore, WSMS enlisted the aid of Rebecca Rasmussen Architects (headed by Rebecca Rasmussen Grunwald, WSMS parent ’06), who asked our faculty to identify what was needed to create that environment. Teachers said that you know that Maria Montessori was an early environmentalist?), so it was only logical that any renovations should reflect these values. In late 2005, a goal to renovate all of our classrooms was established, and The Campaign for West Side Montessori School, a capital campaign to raise $1.2 million dollars to accomplish it, was born. Thanks to the confidence and generosity of the donors to this campaign (see page 21), this dream has become a reality.

The value of the "prepared environment" (an orderly, serene, secure setting where children feel free to explore) is at the heart of Montessori’s educational approach and all that we do at WSMS. Our teachers put much time and care into carefully organizing our classrooms to engage each of our young students in investigation and learn-
more storage, display and workspace was essential. They also requested the use of construction materials that would ensure the highest standard of cleanliness.

One blue-sky idea was to have dishwashers in the classroom. A highlight of our school program is the fact that teachers and students sit down together to enjoy wonderful organic lunches cooked in our own kitchen. This communal meal provides a perfect opportunity for group conversation and interaction. Children help to set and clear the table using washable plates and utensils. Carrying those plates and utensils down to the kitchen for sanitizing was a burden for teachers, while the use of disposables ran against the WSMS ethos.

All faculty and staff input was taken into consideration, and the design and materials specifications were prepared, and planning began in January 2009. Construction commenced the day after school closed in June and was completed—on time and on budget!—before the start of school this September. The results are amazing! Here are just a few examples:

- Each classroom now has sufficient storage space to grant children instant access to materials, thereby facilitating their exploration and maintaining their focus. And the cabinets are made of bamboo, a sustainable material.
- Classrooms and stairwells now have great swaths of easily accessible display space made of Forbo Cork. This washable and soil-resistant linoleum has a "self-healing" surface that accepts pins and tacks and always looks new. It is composed of natural ingredients without any toxins or harmful emissions. Best of all, it provides vast surfaces on which to display children’s work, thus building confidence and promoting sharing.
- IceStone countertops and Marmoleum floors are solid, easy-to-clean surfaces composed of environmentally friendly materials that help us maintain a healthy environment for children. IceStone is made of 100% recycled glass and concrete and is enhanced with non-toxic pigments. Marmoleum is natural and sustainable, made with natural ingredients minus harmful VOC’s or other toxic chemicals. It is installed with solvent-free adhesives.
- The new lighting chosen for our classrooms integrates daylight harvesting, occupancy sensing and dimming, provides non-glare illumination, and has been shown to promote concentration. It is super energy efficient and looks great, too.
• And as for that blue-sky idea? It was realized in the form of dish sanitizing machines (with the highest energy efficiency ratings) installed in each classroom. They are a marvel. Using interior heaters, these machines sanitize those lunch dishes in three minutes flat, after the children have gone for the day.

The list goes on: We were also able to equip classrooms with refrigerators to keep snacks and home lunches fresh; install all-new efficient plumbing fixtures and washer-dryers; and more. The best way to get the whole picture is to come and visit.

Kudos to our Head of School, Mimi Basso; our Associate Head of School for Finance and Operations, Melissa Mack; and my colleagues on the building committee, Jim Blaney and Renan Pierre, for overseeing this project. And again, our heartfelt thanks to everyone who contributed to the campaign. In doing our part to take care of our environment, we are also taking care of our children: in the short run, by providing classrooms that promote good health and optimize concentration and learning opportunities; and in the long run, by teaching them how to be caring and responsible global citizens. What greater mission for WSMS and its parent community to come together to undertake?

Awe and amazement were some of the emotions I felt when I walked into the newly transformed classrooms of West Side Montessori School. I have been a member of the WSMS faculty and administrative staff for almost a decade now, and as I stood in the classroom doorway, I felt such a sense of pride in my school...and I wasn’t alone. A former student of mine ran up to me and said, “Wow, I love it, I put my backpack in the basket.”

One of the many things I value most about WSMS is our foresight. We are always looking for ways to grow and improve. The renovation and “greening” of our classrooms to 21st-century standards is a testament to our being a model urban early childhood program.

Lorén DeNicola
Associate Director of Admissions
and Advancement
My mother and father are educators. As you can imagine, given their chosen profession, they were both thorough and particular in choosing the school where I, their only child, would begin my formal education. In the seventies, nursery schools on the Upper West Side were plentiful following the influx of new young families brave enough to seek out this neighborhood where housing was spacious and very affordable. My mom, who was then teaching at Brearley, had heard of a special kind of first school for very young students. It was called West Side Montessori School (WSMS).

Even then WSMS had a glowing reputation in the community. It was seen as more serious about the education of young children than the other schools serving the same pre-kindergarten age group. The fact that it was based on an educational philosophy distinguished it from the “caretaking” approach perceived to be operational elsewhere. WSMS was the first school on the West Side to embrace the philosophy and practices of Maria Montessori. And although the Montessori approach was not widely known back then, it was considered by those “in the know” to be at the cutting edge of early childhood education. Fast-forward to today… Montessori practices have proliferated in both public and private early childhood and elementary schools around the country and throughout the world. In addition, the Montessori philosophy has profoundly influenced the work of more recent educational thinkers and leaders.

These two facts combine to demonstrate the efficacy of what was then seen as groundbreaking, or, as some might have described it, as a “hippie” approach.

I entered the warm and welcoming classrooms of WSMS in the fall of 1974. I have a distinct memory of sitting in the reading area feeling kind of upset that my mother was leaving. Knowing what I know now, I can imagine how a teacher expertly and caringly helped me to deal with these feelings. It might even have been Elspeth, one of the great teachers from that time whose name I still remember. The school’s mission, then as well as now, promised to involve families in the education of their children, so my mother and father found themselves in a warm learning community of interested as well as interesting adults.

When I returned to the school a few years ago for our oldest child’s interview, I was struck by a strong feeling of déjà vu. I felt that I could see the school through the eyes of a child, and I liked what I saw. That feeling, combined with the rational and authentic reasons that my wife and I had articulated about why we were interested in this school, gave us a warm and confident sense that we were doing the right thing.

Now that we have had the experience of two children attending WSMS, we deeply appreciate the Montessori approach as it is practiced here. Through
friends we had come to understand the value of allowing a child to explore her own interests freely with the guidance of a team of highly trained and expert teachers, thereby gaining independence. At WSMS we saw that principle in action and were delighted at the way our children flourished. Their interests and learning styles are different, but the respect and empathy for others that have developed in them are deeply shared. These lifelong values of how to treat others and develop your own unique abilities are modeled each and every day by their wonderful teachers/guides.

And, like my parents before me, we love being part of this diverse community. We New Yorkers live in a crowded city, and yet the social interactions among its inhabitants are limited. We are grateful to be part of a group where we share interests and values with so many. Supported by faculty, administrators, and staff who partner with us in our efforts to help our children grow and develop, WSMS is a community of learners, good citizens, committed volunteers, and wonderful friends. It truly is...where to begin.

And remember to keep an eye out for the next generation of Southwells. They should begin arriving at this wonderful school in 2033 or thereabouts.

By Alex Southwell
Board Member

Alex Southwell attended West Side Montessori School from September 1974 through June 1977. He is now a Trustee, serving on the Executive and Strategic Planning Committees.

Alex and his wife, Sandy, have three children. Their eldest daughter has already "graduated" from WSMS and is now attending the Trinity School, their middle child is currently enrolled at WSMS, and their youngest will be ready to continue this family tradition in the fall of 2012.

After his beginning at WSMS, Alex attended Columbia Grammar, transferring to Hunter in 7th grade. He obtained his BA at Princeton University and his JD at New York University.

Alex is a member of a large international law firm where he specializes in white collar criminal defense and internal investigations, as well as information technology and privacy matters.
They were baking in the sun. Dressed in boots and long sleeves, they wiped away sweat as they scraped paint off the side of a grand old house in New Orleans. It was exhausting, body-aching work. Some had to stand atop wobbly 10-foot ladders, removing debris from a gutter. Others skinned their knuckles priming stucco. It was hard labor, all day, on a job that was not going to be completed anytime soon, and in the wrong clothes to boot.

Why did they do it?

"Because it was fun," says Natalia Fisher, a teacher at West Side Montessori School.

As part of its annual conference, which this year was held in late February in New Orleans, the American Montessori Society offered a Day of Service to its par-
participants: an opportunity to work on homes hard hit by Katrina, repainting and protecting water-damaged sides. Natalia was one in a group of nine WSMS staffers who worked all day on two separate water-damaged homes.

“It was seven of us working on this huge old house,” explains Natalia. “Two of us, An and Jeca, were at another (house) farther away.”

The others in Natalia’s crew included Melissa Mack, Melissa Vallo, Lorèn DeNicola, Suzanne Hunton, Margot Mack, and Barbara Grant—each one of them assigned to various areas of the enormous house.

“I worked on a wrought iron fence, scraping off old, flaky, rusted paint,” says Melissa Vallo, head teacher of 2Wam. “It was very, very hard work.”

Suzanne Hunton, head teacher of 3W, scraped and painted 6-foot-tall shutters that ran around the house. “There were 30 of ‘em,” says Suzanne. She makes a sly grin. “It was very labor intensive.”

Many in Natalia’s group cite low morale at the beginning of the day. The large house was a daunting project to tackle, they had been asked to wear long-sleeved clothing and boots but quickly saw that the day was going to be a hot one, and then came the kicker: their house had not been directly affected by Katrina, but was actually part of a larger restoration project that was in conjunction with a local church.

“I was mad,” says Barbara Grant. “I thought we were going to be down in the 9th ward, helping out.” But like the others in her group, Barbara soon realized this ultimately did not diminish the significance of the task at hand—there was a family in need. “When we talked to the owner of the house, she was really humbled by the work we were doing—she was so overwhelmed. That felt good.”

Even when the reality of the volunteering assignment clashed with their expectations, everyone in the WSMS group agreed that the work was hard but worth doing, and even entertaining.

“Honestly, we’re New Yorkers,” says Margot Mack. “Many of us have lived here long enough to not have manual labor skills at hand. So just watching New Yorkers out of their element was funny.” She laughs. “Watching Natalia paint was hysterically funny.” Then she adds, “But we got it done, and that was a satisfying feeling.”

“It was funny to hear everyone griping,” says Natalia, “but there was humor to it. It’s fun, you’re making something beautiful.”

An Anglo, a teacher in 2Wpm, put her spin on the work she did with Jeca Rodriguez-Colón on the other house, whose owner had not yet returned to New Orleans.

“I kind of feel like I contributed in whatever little way that I can in helping build a house of a stranger or a person that I didn’t even know, in a house of a stranger that might not even come back,” says An. “For me that is humbling and, emotionally, it’s sort of an awakening. You read in the papers about disasters and calamities, but reading it you’re just a passive reader. But going to the place and experiencing it, it is real.”

The WSMS crew all agreed that they would do the work again, because at the end of the day, as tired and sweaty as they were, the work was satisfying to the spirit.

“It’s going to sound cheesy,” says Natalia, grinning, “but there’s a house out in New Orleans that I helped make beautiful.”
Katie Spencer’s face is painted like a cat’s. Her nose is black. Whiskers sprout from a white muzzle, stretching across her cheeks. She greets her friends in the lobby with a friendly “RAARRR” as they arrive for afternoon classes. Today, Katie Spencer is a cat, and you’d never know by speaking with this playful, hopping, carefree denizen of 2Wpm that she is the leading philanthropist of the West Side Montessori School Capital Campaign this year.

That’s right, leading. As in: the first.

On September 10, 2008, the first day of school, Katie presented a crayon-personalized envelope to Mimi. Inside were ten crumpled single dollar bills, a donation to the school.

“I just wanted to give ten dollars,” says Katie with a small shrug. Not a big deal to the 42-inch-tall painted cat, but a profound gesture of selflessness that was not lost on the Head of School. Today, Katie’s donation envelope sits framed on Mimi’s desk.

Katie had saved portions of her allowance in small increments during the entire summer of 2008. While the money could have gone towards some of Katie’s go-to favorites, like Skittles, it instead accumulated in her piggy bank.

“It’s got a funny nose,” says Katie of her bank.

Katie says she came up with the idea of donating to her school after asking her mother a simple question: “What is donating?” That led to a discussion with her mom about how money can be used: some could be used for spending, some for saving, and some for donating—giving back to something important to you. When Katie thought about a place that was important to her, WSMS was the first that came to mind.

“So then I gave Mimi the envelope and that was it,” concludes Katie with another happy shrug. Altruism comes naturally to this painted cat.

Now it is time for Katie to head upstairs for rehearsal of her final class presentation tomorrow. “I’m playing an old man,” says Katie, deadpan. And so off she goes, the school’s leading donor, up to 2Wpm to do what she does best: have fun.
From the moment prospective parents walk up the stairs into West Side Montessori with their applicant son or daughter, they are witness to the WSMS “culture of giving.” Greeting them is Becky Bonelli, longtime receptionist but before that a WSMS parent who gave generously of her time and energy. They meet Suzanne Day, Director of Admissions, another former school parent and active volunteer. Then the prospective parents are interviewed by a current parent, who has given her or his time to get to know a future fellow WSMS parent—and, if past is prologue, a new WSMS volunteer!

As the article “How We Began…” so clearly demonstrates, WSMS has had a culture of giving from the very first. This section of Great Beginnings acknowledges, with enormous gratitude, the many individuals—current parents, alumni parents, trustees, faculty, staff, friends, and local businesses—that have supported WSMS. Whatever form this support takes—monetary donations to the Annual Fund or to the Campaign for West Side, gifts in kind, contributions of time and talent toward our many school committees and events—each volunteer, each donor, and each gift is vital. The aggregate support of these stakeholders demonstrates both a strong commitment to our mission and the existence of a caring community, two things for which we are deeply thankful.

The following pages list literally hundreds of names: current and past parents, members of the faculty and administration, incredibly generous local businesses. To all of you, our deepest gratitude.

“Whoever touches the life of the child touches the most sensitive point of a whole which has roots in the most distant past and climbs toward the infinite future.”

Maria Montessori
WSMS Board of Trustees
Jim Blaney
Natalie Danner
Marie Dugan
Alex Evans
Sue Foley
Charles Harkless
Peter Howell
Lisa Kohl
Philip Korologos
Alicia McGill
Michael Moran
Jennifer Morrissey
Renan Pierre
Raul Pineda
Barbara Root
Beth Savage
Thomas Sebok
Alex Southwell
Valda Witt

WSMS Administrative Staff
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Kudos to the Board of Trustees and members of the WSMS Faculty and Administration for leading the way to 100% participation in the Annual Fund!

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Cheryl Zinn
Parents Association

One of the greatest strengths of West Side Montessori School is its Parents Association. Composed of the entire parent body, the PA consistently does an incredible job of carrying out multiple missions, all of which are vital to the life of our school:

- Raising funds toward the school’s financial aid program by producing two annual fund-raising events, the Auction and the Spring Fair
- Serving as a voice for parents’ views on policy and program decisions at WSMS
- Building and maintaining a strong school community by promoting understanding and friendship among WSMS families through close communication and a wide array of school events

Every year we are awed by the amount of time, talent, and goodwill bestowed so freely by our parent community. The Parents Association co-chairs, committee chairs, and class representatives, whose names you see here, constitute only a small percentage of the countless parents who sell raffle tickets, chaperone field trips, edit newsletters, host class dinners, and so much more. Our heartfelt thanks to all of you.

Parents Association 2008-2009

PA Co-Presidents
Alicia McGill
Jennifer Morrissey

Class Representatives
Garden  Mili Stojkovic’ Johnson
        Vivian Kuan
1Wam  Soledad Infantino
        Martha Livingston
1Wpm  Victoria Arms
        Julie Hickson
2E   Kristen Chae Arabadjiev
     Amy Hayes
2Wam  Aileen Hefferren
     Rochelle Yu
2Wpm  Liz Canino
     Nyla Islam
3E   Kenneth Rhys
     Allison Scotch
3W   Jae K.Lee
     Courteney Monroe
4E   Kyle Clark
     Martha Genieser
4W   Kat Olin
     Annika Pergament

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Admissions Coordinator  Monica Messler
Auction  Marie Amerasinghe
         Berit Block
Book Fair  Vivian Kuan
          Mariane Liebowitz
Bulb Panting  Anne Hamel
             Susan McLaughlin
Bulletin Boards  Janet Balis
                Regina Buckley
Class Rep Coordinator  Becky Tolson
End-of-Year Picnic  Sayada Rothschild
Grandparents/Special Visitors Day  Kate Fogarty
                              Ellen Grier
                              Amy Groome
Independent School Panel  Gina Larucci
                         Barbara Wood

Monthly Memo  Marisol Morales
              Rebecca Stokes
Parent/Child Events  Jon Sunderland
                    Elena Yoon
Pumpkin Picnic  Martha Genieser
                Morgan Thorne
School Photos  Isabel Gillies
              Jae K.Lee
Second Hand Sue  Elizabeth Elder
                 Pamela Huson
Spring Fair  Liz Canino
            Kristen Chae Arabadjiev
SWAG WSMS Wear  Kristen Chae Arabadjiev
                  Jon Sunderland
                  Elena Yoon
Yearbook  Andy Pearlman
Auction 2009 Co-Chairs
Marie Amerasinghe
Berit Block

Auction Committee Chairs
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Chad Gifford
Dana Johnson
Olivia Kim
Jae K. Lee
Catering
Marta Kohn
Mariane Liebowitz
Jennifer Morrissey
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Isabel Gillies
Decorations & Entertainment
Amy Groome
Vivian Kuan
Live Auction
Amy Middleton
Parent Solicitation
Courteney Monroe
Vilma Vale-Brennan
Personnel
Elizabeth Elder
Alicia McGill
Raffle
Jann Ong Hobbs
Monica Messler
Annika Pergament
Registration
Amy Gould
Cheryl Heike
Set-Up
Liz Canino
Yelena Rakic
Silent & Online Auction
Kristen Chae Arabadjiev
Suzanne Day
Paul Zimmerman
Take Down & Follow-Up
Kenneth Rhys
Renee Yu
Vendor Solicitation
Kelly Nishimura
Greg Thorne

Auction

The green, yellow, and purple masks did not prevent enthusiastic parents and friends of WSMS from making this year's Auction the best yet. The Mardi Gras theme and free-flowing margaritas (thank you again, Rosa Mexicano!) fueled the fun in the transformed space of Rodeph Sholom. The sounds of Stumblebum Brass Band, a punk jazz trio expertly chosen for the event, filled the air, adding an upbeat New Orleans flair. Photos of children in action in their classrooms flashed on a big screen, a reminder to all of our common cause. With an astonishing array of prizes in the Raffle, Live and Silent Auctions, there was almost no excuse to come home empty-handed. It was a great night for WSMS families to get together and show their support for our Financial Aid Fund.

New this year was the opportunity to bid for select items online, enabling people with Auction night conflicts – as well as alumni families – to participate... and they did! In all, the Auction raised almost $200,000 for the WSMS Financial Aid Fund.

Chairs Marie Amerasinghe and Berit Block recruited a creative and hardworking set of sub-chairs who were unstinting in their efforts: organizing, setting up, operating the auction, and – especially – soliciting contributions from parents, faculty, friends, and an amazing list of businesses, ranging from local stores to high-end restaurants. We encourage you to patronize our supporters and thank them for their generosity.

A special thank you goes to the WSMS faculty, who once again dazzled us with their innovative efforts showcasing each class's talents. WSMS faculty also provided unique Live Auction items reflecting the gift of their own time and interest doing something special with a small group of children. Of course, the first-ever WSMS slumber party was the hit of the evening!
Live Auction 2009

Faculty Donors
Carol Baird
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Teresa Chi
Natalie Danner
Sandrine Durand
Kristin Finch
Natalia Fisher
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Seung Hee Nam
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Nubia Ramirez
Carol Roehr
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Julie and Townsend Ziebold

Vendor Donors
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Best of Old & New World Wines
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Exhale Spa
The Gazillion Bubble Show
Hotel Beacon
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The New World Stages
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Regina Fleming Photography
Renaissance Cigar Emporium
Robert Stuart Salon
Rosa Mexicano
Soulcycle
Sphatika International, LLC
Strip House
Wine & Roses Bar & Cafe
Online Auction 2009

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Kate and Scott Fogarty
Michelle Simmons and Noah Carlson
Lisa and Charlie Carr
Henry and Judy Cheng
David and Kyle Clark
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Michelle Simmons and Noah Carlson
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Stationary & Toy World
STOKKE
Striking Viking Story Pirates
Sue Barr Photography
Trump Organization
Upper Meadows Farm
West Side Taekwondo
Wollman Rink in Central Park
Spring Fair 2009 Co-Chairs
Kristen Chae Arabadjiev
Liz Canino

Spring Fair Committee Chairs

Bake Sale
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Mo Shome

Banking
Jennifer Morrissey
Greg Thorne

Books
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Elizabeth Gonzalez
Julie Hickson

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Robin Alston
Rita Belin
Nissa Booker

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Pam Huson
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Set-Up
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Scott Millstein

Signage
Regina Buckley
Natalie Ryan

Take-Down
Kristen Chae Arabadjiev
Liz Canino

Tickets
Paulina Arredondo
Vilma Vale–Brennan

Trolley
Thomas Hinkle
Dan Wood

After months of preparation, the night before the annual Spring Fair is always fraught with worries about the weather, and this year was no different. The forecast was: “to rain or not to rain.” Co-Chairs Kristen Chae Arabadjiev and Liz Canino breathed a collective sigh of relief when the day dawned dry. Through a parent who is a pilot they managed to obtain an official airspace forecast... but to ward off the clouds Kristen kept her rain boots on ALL day. And it worked!

The set-up crew arrived around 8:00 a.m., happy to discover the street free of cars. There was a flurry of activity, and three short hours later, as if by magic, everything was in place and ready for business.

Children, parents, teachers, and neighbors flocked to 92nd Street for a grand day of sun and fun. Children danced to Motown tunes, sang along with Ms. Nina, ate sweet corn, and fished for treats. As usual, kids got their faces painted, decorated yummy cupcakes, went back countless times to the Moonwalk, and clamored for yet another ride on the “Motown” trolley. The bake sale featured highly caloric and hard-to-pass-up goodies (and a few healthy treats, too), and the food choices ranged from delicious soul food (with kudos to Barbara Grant and her culinary cohort) to good ol’ hamburgers.

We ended the day with a $35,747 dollar contribution to the WSMS Financial Aid Fund. Thanks go to Co-Chairs Kristen and Liz, and to the stellar group of sub-chairs they assembled whose energy, creativity, and good spirit made this a special day.
Spring Fair 2009 Donors

Parent Donors
The Arabadjiev Family  
Shelley and Donald Bekins  
Jim and Sandy Boker-Smith  
Jim and Maria Botsacos  
Suzanne and Doug Day  
Elizabeth Elder  
The Fricklas Family  
Elizabeth Gonzalez  
Pamela Huson  
Maggie Lear and Daniel Katz  
Olivia Kim and James Lochart  
Sasha Nemecads  
The Ryan Family  
The Canino/Spencer Family  
The Tamussino Family  
Thomas Williamson  
The Worster Family

Vendor Donors
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Cardiology  
Carmine’s  
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Coke  
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Gold Leaf Stationers  
GUS—Grown Up Soda  
Hermitage Studios  
Honest Tea  
Infinity Shoes  
Jazz at Lincoln Center  
Key West Diner  
Knitty City  
Le Pain Quotidien  
Lenny’s Bagels  
Little Apples Photography  
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Viacom  
West Side Kids  
Whole Foods  
Wollman Rink  
Zabar’s
With special thanks to:
The WSMS Faculty, who demonstrate professional excellence and their dedication to our young students by using photography to allow us to see and learn from what takes place inside the classrooms. Most of the photographs of children in Great Beginnings are theirs.

The WSMS Administrative Team, a multitalented, multitasking, always collaborative group that helped bring this new magazine into being.

Every gift to West Side Montessori School makes a difference, regardless of its form or size. Gifts of time and talent, monetary gifts of whatever quantity...each and every gesture of your support demonstrates your confidence in our educational program and our mission. Our community of donors—current families, former families, trustees, faculty, staff, grandparents, alumni, and friends—helps sustain our school and invest in its future.

If you have questions about making a gift of any kind to West Side Montessori School, please contact:
Patricia Luciani, Advancement Office
West Side Montessori School
309 West 92nd Street
New York, NY 10025
pluciani@wsmsnyc.org,

We have made every effort to be as accurate as possible in compiling our lists of donors and volunteers. If we have inadvertently omitted your name or made errors in spelling, please call the Advancement Office at 212-662-8000, and accept our sincere apologies.