ON COMMON GROUND
WSMS Teachers’ Trip to Ghana

WSMS-TEP RECOGNIZED AS
MODEL TEACHER ED PROGRAM

BACK WHERE IT ALL BEGAN:
Three Alumni Return to WSMS

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I begin each day feeling honored to be part of the remarkable culture of learning and giving that is the West Side Montessori School. I believe that our compelling mission inspires faculty, staff, donors, and volunteers to accomplish extraordinary things on behalf of the children we so proudly serve. I continue to be amazed by the marvelous atmosphere of support that permeates our school. One look through the pages of the Annual Report of Giving provides a clear demonstration of commitment on the part of the WSMS community. It is a privilege to be able to express my deepest gratitude to all those who have been unstintingly generous with their resources, time, creativity, and expertise. We are a small school that continues to be able to do big things because of the support we receive.

This has been a year of significant advances at WSMS. One of them was the implementation of a “scholar in residence” program to enhance our ability to integrate state-of-the-art educational research and practice into the classroom. We chose music as our first subject because recent studies have shown a correlation between music education for young children and strong math performance. We also know that music adds a joy to learning that is indispensable in early childhood. Two additional advances—initiating an international professional development program and obtaining reaccreditation for our Montessori Teacher Education Program (WSMS-TEP)—are well described in this issue of Great Beginnings and provide insight into our ongoing aspiration to achieve excellence in all that we do, whether serving children directly or helping teachers to flourish and to improve their work with children.

I wish to express my boundless gratitude to our Parents Association for creating opportunities for families to get to know and enjoy each other throughout the year, and for working so diligently to raise funds for tuition assistance through the Auction and Spring Fair. I was fortunate this past year to have the indefatigable support of PA Co-Presidents Jae K. Lee and Chad Gifford, who expertly led scores of volunteers in making this a successful and enjoyable year on all counts.

Having served as Head of School for three years now, I remain in awe of the energy, dedication, and sheer intellectual rigor demonstrated by our faculty. It is a privilege to work with a community of individuals who continually seek to improve their understanding of teaching for the benefit of our students.

In closing, I want to express my appreciation to our Board of Trustees for all that they have accomplished this year, particularly to Board President Valda Witt, who has brought a new level of professionalism to our governance. And, on behalf of all of the children enrolled at WSMS, I wish to extend my heartfelt thanks to all of the families, grandparents, alumni families, and friends mentioned in these pages for your participation, confidence, and generosity in our mission.

Please enjoy this issue of Great Beginnings.

MIMI BASZOS
HEAD OF SCHOOL
As President of the Board of Trustees, I am delighted to report that gifts to the WSMS Annual Fund grew significantly in 2009–2010. Our school, like many, has been greatly affected by the current economic turmoil. In response to this challenge, however, the WSMS community has scaled new heights. Annual Fund giving increased 62% over the previous year, and participation by current families reached an all-time high—a 66% increase over 2008–2009 levels. WSMS trustees, faculty, and staff achieved 100% participation in the Annual Fund for the second year in a row! The school is grateful to our trustees for their leadership, and to our faculty and staff, who already give so much of themselves every day yet go above and beyond what is required of them in their unanimous support of the Annual Fund.

We feel very fortunate to have in Mimi Basso a school leader whose energy, knowledge, and vision provide daily inspiration to the children, families, faculty, and staff with whom she works. Her expertise in early childhood Montessori education is exceptional, as is her ability to effectively manage the astounding range of responsibilities that together characterize a successful Head of School.

On behalf of the entire WSMS community I wish to thank those on the Development Committee: Myles Amend, Marie Dugan, Lisa Kohl, Jae K. Lee, and the 2009–2010 Annual Fund Co-Chairs, Sue Foley and Alicia McGill; the Auction, Spring Fair, and Second Hand Sue Co-Chairs: Steve Bommarito and Morgan Thorne; Faith Kewfi and Alison Schwartz; and Michelle Babu, Mili Johnson, and Rochelle Yu; and our School Advancement Office, led by Patricia Luciani, for setting the highest standards of professionalism and dedication.

As we approach our 50th anniversary in 2013, we can take pride in our financial strength and in the generous support of our families and friends. Each contribution to WSMS helps us to sustain and enhance the exceptional level of education that we offer each child; to continue to attract and retain superb teachers through fair and competitive compensation and outstanding professional development opportunities; to offer financial aid to more than 20% of our students; and to achieve a balanced budget while maintaining and augmenting reserves to ensure the school’s long-term vitality. To all of you whose names are mentioned in this Annual Report, we cannot thank you enough for all that you have done—and will hopefully continue to do—to enhance the ongoing success and strength of WSMS.

VALDA WITT
(KATHERINE ‘04, WILLIAM ‘05, ANDREW ‘09, BENJAMIN 4W)
PRESIDENT OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES
Fund-Raising Results

2009-2010:

**ANNUAL FUND** $252,285

**AUCTION (NET)** $152,509

**SPRING FAIR (NET)** $20,632

**TOTAL** $425,426

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2009-2010 Revenue (unaudited)

- Auction and Spring Fair (net) 4%
- Annual Fund Contributions 5%
- Tuition and Programs 91%

2009-2010 Operating Expenses (unaudited)

- Financial Aid and ACS Family Support 15%
- Administrative Costs 22%
- Building Maintenance 13%
- Instruction Expense 50%
“As always with any trip, one starts by thinking, ‘This is the way it will happen. First this, then this, and it will end like this,’” remarks Joan Shisler, master teacher and beloved member of the WSMS faculty since 1980.

Joan was one of seven WSMS teachers to travel to Ghana this past summer for the school’s very first international faculty development trip. She explains, “Speaking for myself, I thought we would come into a classroom, watch children and teachers in their lessons, get to work with the children, show them some games, sing some songs, and show activities that the donated equipment could be used for.” While some of these events came to pass, nothing could have prepared Joan and her fellow travelers for the extent to which they would be invited into the lives and culture of the Ghanaian people, or for the lessons they would learn as a result. Joan describes the journey as “a thoroughly incredible, exciting, and rewarding trip...that will be etched in my mind for the rest of my life,” and the other teachers—Teresa Chi (Garden), Katherine Fordney (3Wpm), Nanci Guartofierro (1W), Margot Mack (LAP), Marcia Polanco (3E), and Windy Wellington (LAP)—heartily concur.

AN INTERNATIONAL TEACHER DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITY IS BORN

The idea for an international teacher enrichment program grew out of WSMS’s long-standing commitment to providing exceptional opportunities for teachers to expand their horizons, enrich their skills, and share with colleagues the insights and techniques they have gained. In the summer of 2009 two WSMS teachers, Megan Cahill and Margot Mack, accompanied WSMS parent and Sarah Lawrence faculty member Catherine McKinley (Ephrem Davis, ’10, and Shalom Davis, 4W) on a research trip to Ghana. It was the teachers’ first trip to the continent of Africa. Catherine, on the other hand, is a Ghana insider, having worked there for several summers as a Fulbright scholar. Catherine’s wonderful contacts—the “Ghana family,” as Margot calls
them—and her special knowledge made it possible for Megan and Margot to experience the culture and people of Ghana in a way that is typically off-limits to tourists.

"The faces, lives, and roles of children factored heavily in my impression of the continent and culture," says Margot about her trip last year. "What were the lives of young children like in contrast to the population of children I worked with while teaching? How does one put what she knows nothing of into context? Time? I thought to myself quietly, I will be back, I must."

After a year of planning, the first international teacher development program in the school's 47-year history was good to go. All teachers interested in traveling to Ghana over the summer were invited to submit an application. The seven participants were chosen by lottery. Catherine McKinley agreed to accompany the teachers as their guide. As is typical in our community, WSMS families participated in this endeavor as well, providing generously through their contributions of financial support, as well as gifts and supplies for the children and teachers in Ghana.

FROM DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES... COME INSPIRATION AND RENEWAL

Each of the seven teachers, as you will see from the stories below, came away with a personal perspective on her experience. This diversity of ideas added spark to the faculty discussions that took place during the week of preparation preceding the opening of school in September. The following excerpts from the teachers' travel notes provide a window into the creative and personal process by which excellent teachers become inspired and renewed and in turn become a source of inspiration to others. In addition, their collective experience will serve as a new lens through which to view what we do in the classroom, thus enabling all of us to find ever better ways of providing the best possible educational foundation for our students.

ARRIVAL

When arriving in Ghana last year I remember my brain on overload, awash with color, unfamiliar sounds, sights and smells...I was in love, overwhelmed, and at home at the same time. The energy of the market, the landscape with its deep red earth, the lush green of the tree canopy, and the openness in which I was received from the people I had the great fortune to meet, all had a deep impression on me.  
—Margot Mack

My eyes did not know where to look from all the visual stimulation. I saw images that will stay with me forever. I felt the beaming sun on my body and I welcomed the misty rain. I constantly smelled the odor of burning garbage, the open sewage, and other smells I could not identify. At times, I went to sleep and woke up to the sound of goats and roosters. The food was full of spices and at times too spicy for me to eat.  
—Marcia Polanco

We drove around the market area—what a sight to see. It made the crowds of New York look quiet! So many people selling so much stuff! People are carrying everything from carrots to trays of apples to toothbrushes in baskets and bowls on their heads to sell! People set up at tables selling coconuts, people at colorfully painted shacks selling phone cards. It is a sensory feast!  
—Nanci Guartafiero

I was not prepared for the absolute physical beauty of the people, and especially the children; glowing dark skin, white teeth, often garbed in traditional costume and barefoot. I saw young children saddled to the backs of children not much bigger than themselves, and children carrying wares on top of their heads either at market, running up to our van as we waited to move along, or just going from one place to another, perhaps home.  
—Windy Wellington

AN EXCEPTIONAL WELCOME

For all of the teachers, one of the most powerful and uplifting experiences was their three-day visit to the peaceful and verdant village of Tysome (pronounced Shomay) in a rural area outside of Accra.

We were welcomed into an outdoor meeting room and invited to take a seat in the chairs provided. When the head of the village came, he sat and silently regarded us. Then he said, "You are welcome." It was remarkable how present this man was; he was calm and relaxed, and it seemed like he had the ability to really see us. After this we shared a drink, which was first dripped on the floor in honor of the ancestors. It's lucky that we all drank, because afterwards we learned that refusing to drink would have been highly insulting.

The teachers had also gathered, and we sat to talk with them. At this point we offered the donations we had brought. As is the custom, we laid all the things we had brought—art
in a double row while the Beanie Babies were distributed. Breathtaking was watching them dance with the Beanies atop their heads or shoulders, or held lovingly to their bodies as they celebrated. In many ways, their lives are so rich. How is that instilled?

How does this experience inspire me as a person and educator? Preconceived ideas are just that. This experience magnifies for me the importance and appreciation of our similarities and differences, and of celebrating all.
—Windy

Children’s faces that light up when singing or when receiving a small gift or sweet are the same as those of WSMS children. But at the same time the lives of the Ghanaian children are different in a way that is not easily understood by an outsider. What was their experience of us, with our digital cameras and sweets? As we sang “A Rum Sum Sum” under the eaves of a building as rain poured from the sky, the children smiled and joined in with our hand movements, making our connection with them no more complete than when our WSMS children take part...what joy!

We were greeted with the rhythmic drumming, singing, and dancing of young children that went on for hours. Who were we, what had we done to earn such a greeting? My heart ached; tears fell. It is easy to look at the differences in the way that these children are living, but what stood out to me was the happiness and sense of community that their lives seemed so full of, and that we were invited to be part of during our short visit.
—Margot

VALUING TIME, EACH OTHER, AND WHAT WE HAVE

Throughout the trip our teachers saw many similarities and differences between the Ghanaian culture and our own. They were particularly impressed by the importance Ghanaians place on respect, the value of time, and the appreciation for what one has.

For us, the slow, stately pace that people value and follow was a welcome change. The Ghanaian culture makes time for quality social exchanges. It’s never just a quick hello; Ghanaians look each other in the eyes, greet each person they meet in a jolly manner....Even in the city, the goal of life is centered not on how fast exchanges can be made, but on the quality of the exchanges. The extra time allotted seems to affect children in a positive way. They seem grounded and settled. They don't seem stressed by their responsibilities; they take life one step at a time.
—Katherine

That said, teachers observed universal similarities as well:

As thanks, the children proceeded to sing, dance, and play instruments for their guests for the next three hours.

I was deeply impressed and humbled watching the children wait patiently

By direction, the children—there were probably sixty of them—lined up and one by one were offered one piece of candy. This was the beginning of a huge exclamation of happiness. When the candy had been given, it was time for the stuffed animals, or chobis. Again, the children lined up and, from youngest to oldest, received their gift.... At one point a stuffed animal fell on the ground. Instead of claiming it, a young child gave it back to the teacher first.... In that moment I understood the respect and patience these young children were able to embody.
—Katherine Fordney
“I saw in the Ghanaian children a peacefulness and steadiness that seemed to result from the lack of pressure to accomplish. Though doing well in school and studying are important to them, the pace allows for more time for socialization.”

—Margot Mack

that they spoke were different than ours, their existence on this planet is the same as ours. It is something we have heard again and again: we are more the same than we are different. But seeing it and living it are different than just giving lip service to it.

—Margot Mack

VISITING ANOTHER SCHOOL

In Accra, the WSMS group visited the school/refuge at CAS (Catholic Action for Street Children, www.casghana.com), a local NGO whose mission is to assist and educate children living on the streets. Its director and co-founder is an engaging and dedicated Dutch missionary called Brother Jos (pronounced Yoos). CAS offers preschool classes for children ages 2 to 6 whose families live and work on the streets of Accra, as well as life skills classes for older street children.

Brother Jos told us how some of the workers go out to the streets to try to get the kids to come [to school]. Once the kids get there they need education in just some basic life skills, their version of Practical Life. There were kids doing laundry, sewing, and doing wood carvings. Jos said some of them just come to have a place to sleep during the day (they are open from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m.). Once they get the kids there they try to interest them in the educational aspect and encourage them to attend classes, but no one is forced. They keep track of where the children are so that if they don’t come to the center in a while one of the workers goes out to try to find them. Once the children start to take part in these classes and seem motivated to learn, there is a farm where they can go work, and some even get to the point where the center can have them attend a regular school. Sad as the lives of some of the kids are, there was a definite aspect of hope, as some children who go through the program return to work there.

—Nanci

CAS was very grateful for all our donations; they were thrilled at our having brought needed supplies all the way from the United States....What I received from them, however, was tenfold. I had the opportunity to meet a man whose passion and love of children made him give up the “good life” and spend his time far from his native home, helping and protecting people who might not have someone else to protect them. I got to meet children who are trying to change their lives...for an uncertain and hopefully brighter future. I was fortunate to sit with WSMS colleagues soaking up the information we were given, and then to learn even more from our discussions through the rest of the trip.

—Joan Shisler

OBSERVATIONS TO CHERISH AND GROW ON

Although interaction with schoolchildren was relatively limited during this trip, the teachers came away with a new outlook on larger aspects of life that will undoubtedly have a significant impact on their work in the classrooms at WSMS.

I went there thinking vaguely that I would bring back things to use in the classroom so the children could experience Ghana through objects like musical instruments, baskets, fabrics, etc., but what was most interesting to me was how people use what’s available and don’t waste....I did get some things for the classroom, but I’ve also been thinking of ways to just use what we already have. For example, I didn’t get an African drum (which they make out of materials available there), but I think the water bottles for the coffee machine at WSMS would make great drums for our classrooms.

—Teresa Chi

I have been inspired to take more time with children. New York City moves at a fast pace, but we have the luxury and the power to slow things down at WSMS. I saw in the Ghanaian children a peacefulness and steadiness that seemed to result from the lack of pressure to accomplish. Though doing well in school and studying are important to them, the pace allows for more time for socialization.

—Margot

At WSMS we ask children to be open to others whose lives and ideas may be very different from their own. My time in Ghana made me very aware of how awkward this can sometimes feel but how eye-opening it can be when you do try to set your own beliefs aside for a moment and really listen.

—Teresa
This experience has taught me that you don’t need a lot. How easy our way of life has become....We all need to work as a community to help mankind and preserve Mother Nature and stop taking for granted what we have.
—Marcia

A FINAL THOUGHT FROM CATHERINE MCKINLEY, WSMS PARENT AND GHANA GUIDE

In Ghana, I got to experience WSMS from a new angle and fall in love with the teachers in the ways my children have. I simultaneously watched them become “babies” and students of Ghana: employing the skills they ask of their classrooms; experiencing wonder and pleasure; and being comfortably (and sometimes uncomfortably) stretched.

The Ghana group is back at school now, sharing what they have learned with faculty colleagues, children, and families; the planning for next year’s international faculty development opportunity has begun; but the mark this first trip has left on the teachers, and the positive impact it will ultimately have on their students and the rest of us, are indelible.

“This experience magnifies for me the importance and appreciation of our similarities and differences, and of celebrating all.”

—Windy Wellington
Part of the mission of West Side Montessori School is our deep commitment to better understanding what education for young children is about and to sharing these emerging understandings with parents and the broader educational and social service communities. To that end we help prepare future teachers through our on-site weekend Montessori teacher preparation program (WSMS-TEP) and through our vigorous student teaching program.

The Montessori approach, combined with ongoing and extensive child development research, provides the common ground for TEP students, faculty, and WSMS to do the very best job that we can to support each child in developing an exceptional educational beginning.

Every seven years, WSMS-TEP must stand for reaccreditation. Our accrediting agency is the Montessori Accreditation Council for Teacher Education, or MACTE. When graduates earn a certificate from a MACTE-accredited program, they are assured that their Montessori credential will be recognized throughout the world.

In late July, WSMS-TEP welcomed the MACTE/AMS accrediting team. (AMS—the American Montessori Society—is a partner with MACTE in establishing criteria for accreditation.) The team came to validate the self-study; to observe the TEP program in action; to interview current students, graduates of the program, employers of WSMS-TEP graduates, and WSMS-TEP faculty; and to review a broad assortment of documents, including admission and enrollment policies, student records, syllabi, financial records, assessment protocols, and quality assurance indicators.

The team found WSMS-TEP to be in full compliance with every standard. They stated that WSMS-TEP is a model program that serves its students as well as the Montessori community.
MACTE’s written report articulated the following strengths:

- This is an organization that clearly knows its identity as defined by its mission statement. All activities are designed to clearly support the mission.
- Students voice a strong sense of community and support for their learning process.
- The diversity of the faculty and students creates a culturally rich environment.
- The teachers provide an excellent model for an urban Montessori child-centered environment.
- Among the faculty there is a clear understanding of roles and of the importance of working together.
- There is a strong indication that the teachers collaborate on curriculum development, reflect on the efficacy of the program, and strive to meet the needs of students.
- The institution regularly seeks feedback, is open to suggestions, and makes an effort to improve.
- The program provides exceptional direction during the practicum phase. The plan, including the practicum coordinator and the student teaching seminar, provides clear requirements and well-defined methods of accountability, guidance, and support.

The team also congratulated us on our steady growth. They noted that throughout the country many Montessori teacher education programs are experiencing declining enrollment, and several are offering classes only every other year. In contrast, this summer we welcomed our largest class ever (24 students).

Program administrators (and senior WSMS faculty members) Nanci Guartofierro and Melissa Vallo earned well-deserved kudos for all they did to prepare for this visit. Over the course of 18 months they completed the self-study and compiled all of the documents to be reviewed on-site. In doing this work, they also developed improved systems that contribute to our administrative efficiency and to our growing numbers. For example, they developed a series of information sessions for prospective students. As program administrators, Melissa and Nanci had the opportunity to share their impressive classroom expertise while expanding their own skill and experience bases.

Mimi Basso, Head of School, also expressed her appreciation to the entire WSMS-TEP faculty, hailing them as dedicated, gifted professionals with a sincere desire to share their talents with developing teachers. The work they do ensures that those who complete WSMS-TEP will be effective, responsive, well-prepared teachers.

Mimi also cited the WSMS faculty, who daily model excellent professional qualities and adhere to the highest standards; the head teachers, who work with student teachers every day in their classrooms; and the Montessori schools that welcome and support TEP students in their internship year and hire our graduates.

What Is WSMS-TEP, Anyway?
In 1967 the Central Harlem Association of Montessori Parents (CHAMP) offered a series of workshops designed to help parents become partners in their children’s education. This program evolved into Project CHAMP, which prepared parents to become Montessori teachers. Classes were held on weekends, often in the school of the instructor.

In 1995 CHAMP-MTEP moved to West Side Montessori School and, to meet New York State requirements, changed its name to West Side Montessori School’s Teacher Education Program (WSMS-TEP). Graduates earn the Montessori credential and, if appropriate, up to 30 undergraduate credits from Empire State College.

WSMS-TEP continues to be well known for the wide range of ethnic and cultural backgrounds of its students, and for its uniquely qualified faculty. This year’s WSMS-TEP students speak 10 languages; some students are seeking career changes,
while others are just starting out; three students are current or former WSMS parents. The faculty includes current and former WSMS teachers and administrators, as well as faculty and administrators from other Montessori schools in New York City.

Our graduates are well prepared to create child-centered environments, to design thematic curriculum units, and to work collaboratively with parents, co-workers, and other professionals. Most important, they understand the importance of developing relationships with children. And they are terrific teachers—approximately half of the WSMS faculty are TEP alumnae!

“The training of the teacher is something far more than the learning of ideas. It is a preparation of the spirit.”

—Maria Montessori

### WSMS-TEP Faculty

The WSMS-TEP faculty are an impressive group with strong professional backgrounds and a love of both teaching and learning. Most, but not all, are current WSMS teachers. Several are WSMS-TEP graduates themselves. And all embody the above words of Maria Montessori.

- **CAROL BAIRD** (Cultural Subjects – Movement): WSMS movement teacher
- **MIMI BASSO** (Program Director): Head of West Side Montessori School
- **LORÉN DENICOLA** (Philosophy and Student Teacher Supervisor); former WSMS head teacher
- **NATALIA FISHER** (Math Instructor): WSMS head teacher
- **NANCI GUARTOFIERRO** (Cultural Studies and Program Administrator): WSMS head teacher
- **WENDY KALICHSTEIN** (Cultural Studies and Field Consultant): Administrator, Jack and Jill Montessori School, East Rockaway, NY
- **YAYOI KOBAYASHI** (Math Instructor): WSMS-TEP alumna; Park West Montessori School teacher
- **DONNA LONGDON** (Student Teacher Seminar): WSMS head teacher
- **MARGOT MACK** (Cultural Studies – Art): WSMS-TEP alumna; WSMS head teacher
- **ROBYN MERNICK** (Language): WSMS head teacher
- **MELISSA VALLO** (Practical Life, Sensory Motor, and Program Administrator): WSMS-TEP alumna; WSMS head teacher
- **STEPHANIE WHALEN** (Child Development and Observation): Education Director, Park West Montessori School
- **SUZANNE WRIGHT** (Language Instructor): WSMS teacher

For more information about WSMS-TEP and its faculty, please consult the WSMS web site (www.wsmsnyc.org).
Thomas is currently leaning toward a career in business, and he credits WSMS with providing the foundation for his college studies and, ultimately, his career: “I didn’t realize until now what a positive impact [WSMS] had on what I am doing today...how important early learning is. [I can see] bits and pieces in my current interest in learning.” His experience with the kids at WSMS has prepared him for another important job as well: being an uncle to his four-month-old niece Bonnie (daughter of Thomas’s sister, Jamie, WSMS Class of ’88, and first grandchild of Becky).

Becky has seen literally thousands of children graduate from WSMS over the years, but the school’s mission has remained unchanged. “Even when my daughter Jamie was applying, way back in 1985, WSMS had the reputation of being a magical early childhood school—where kids were respected and encouraged to explore and learn at their own pace,” Becky says. “Both Thomas and Jamie developed some lasting habits of mind and values at WSMS, and I learned some dynamite parenting skills. I’ve been so fortunate to be a part of this community, first as a parent and now as a staff member, and hopefully soon as a grandmother. WSMS indeed lives up to its promise of providing kids with an exceptional educational beginning—one that gives them a strong foundation for a lifetime of learning.”

Sixteen-year-old Molly Connelly was the fourth in her family to attend WSMS, so she started making daily appearances at school when only a few months old. Now a student at boarding school, Molly made daily appearances once again this summer as an essential part of WSMS Summer Camp: at the front desk, welcoming campers and their parents or caregivers as they arrived every morning; in the classroom, where she was delighted to see familiar Montessori materials...
in beautifully and ecologically updated settings; and outside WSMS, escorting campers on swimming lessons and other outings. Her favorite moment of every day was “walking into the classroom and having the kids shout my name.”

Molly aspires to sing professionally, and she delighted in teaching the children new to WSMS such lyrics as “we’re at the corner...” and “turning the corner...” Although the songs she wrote and recorded this summer are aimed at an older audience, perhaps she’ll be back at WSMS in a few years, sharing her talent in those music classes up in the gym.

Molly’s mom, Tina Connelly, marveled at seeing her daughter back at WSMS in this new context. She recalls, “I loved bringing her the occasional Starbucks and watching her interactions at the front desk with children and parents. It was exciting as a parent to see Molly so clearly comfortable in a role that required maturity, diplomacy, and enthusiasm!”

Molly’s mom, Tina Connelly, marveled at seeing her daughter back at WSMS in this new context. She recalls, “I loved bringing her the occasional Starbucks and watching her interactions at the front desk with children and parents. It was exciting as a parent to see Molly so clearly comfortable in a role that required maturity, diplomacy, and enthusiasm!”

Julia Cohen (WSMS Class of ’02), an 8th-grade student at Columbia Grammar, is an avid equestrian and tennis player, but she leaped at the opportunity to spend time back in the WSMS classrooms this summer. When asked why she felt drawn to working at WSMS, she replies simply, “I love working with younger children. I worked with them in my After School program at Columbia Grammar, so I thought this would be a good way to spend some time this summer.”

Julia says that the best part of her experience this summer was being in the classroom with the children and working with the teachers, some of whom she had known earlier. “It was the same activities—some were exactly the same—and it was nice to be in the classrooms because I remember being there and doing the activities,” she explains. “I especially loved the sewing work when I was little, and the pouring work, and I loved seeing the children using them again now.” She also enjoyed helping the children learn to use familiar materials, like buttons and zippers, and she was impressed with the renovated classrooms.

Like Molly and Thomas, Julia embraces the Montessori philosophy: You don’t tell a child what to do, but rather acknowledge her/his ability to be independent and make a decision. But when asked about her greatest challenge this summer, she mentions a child who spilled yogurt on herself and then refused to change her clothes!

Julia’s mom, Elizabeth Cohen, appreciates the continuity between attending WSMS as a student and working there alongside the teachers. She says, “When Julia started school, we were so happy to be sending her off to WSMS, where we knew she would be respected and appreciated for who she was. Ten years later, we couldn’t have been happier that she was getting her first work experience in that same environment. She loved going off to WSMS every morning, this time on her own!”

The skill and confidence with which Julia, Molly, and Thomas have interacted with children in the classroom reinforces how important and long-lasting early childhood experiences are. Each of them knew instinctively how to use the varied materials in the classroom, how to give students gentle direction while allowing them the chance to figure out what to do. And each of them is building upon the strong foundations of their own WSMS experiences in forging unique and exciting academic and personal opportunities—a priceless gift at any age.
WEST SIDE MONTESSORI SCHOOL
ANNUAL REPORT OF GIVING
2009-2010
For almost 50 years our mission to provide an exceptional educational beginning for our students has been unwavering. If anything, ensuring a solid foundation at the very start of a child’s academic career has become even more critical in light of what we have learned about child development and its effects on lifelong learning, personal satisfaction, and achievement. Providing this foundation for our students is the common ground that brings together, in outstanding generosity, all members of our community: families, faculty, staff, grandparents, friends, and local businesses.

Parents experience our mission firsthand as well. At this early stage of their children’s educational experience, parent involvement is essential to understanding the needs of each child, as well as helping parents learn how to become their children’s best-equipped and most persuasive advocates.

We believe that giving each child the foundation for becoming a self-directed learner, flexible thinker, creative problem solver, resilient individual, and empathic citizen is our gift to the future of our immediate community and beyond. This mission drives us to continually improve what we know and what we do in service to our children.

There were 215 students at West Side Montessori School this past year (2009-2010), and in fact we have been fully enrolled every year since we began 47 years ago. Each child is a unique and compelling reason to support our school. Providing them with a strong foundation for success is an investment in our collective future. Parents and grandparents (current and former), friends, and interested local businesses understand our mission and generously show their support. This year families exceeded the goal of $215,000 that was set for the Annual Fund. And, as the following pages demonstrate, participation in giving and volunteering reached record levels.

We are enormously grateful to our community of givers. Your generosity of spirit and your belief in our mission make it possible for us to continually enhance our ability to support our own children—and, through our research and teacher education program, the community of children who are on their way to becoming our future.
...reasons you supported

...and there are 211 reasons to
WSMS ANNUAL REPORT OF GIVING 2009-2010

WSMS IN 2009-2010
SUPPORT WSMS IN 2010-2011!
The Annual Fund 2009-2010

WSMS FACULTY, STAFF, AND TRUSTEES ACHIEVE 100% PARTICIPATION FOR THE SECOND YEAR IN A ROW!

The Cornerstone of Our Fund-Raising Effort

Every gift to the Annual Fund makes a significant difference to our school. Each contribution helps us to sustain and enhance the exceptional level of education that we offer each child; to continue to attract and retain superb teachers through fair and competitive compensation and outstanding professional development opportunities; to offer financial aid to more than 20% of our students; and to achieve a balanced budget while maintaining and augmenting reserves to ensure the school’s long-term vitality.

The Importance of 100% Participation

Community support is one key indicator of the strength of any school, and WSMS is strengthened immeasurably by the many tangible ways in which our community demonstrates its commitment to our mission. For the second year in a row, 100% of our board, faculty, and staff have contributed to the Annual Fund. This is a significant milestone, and we are most grateful for their unanimous show of support. Thanks in large part to the leadership exhibited by our board, faculty, and staff, the participation of enrolled families in the Annual Fund has grown to 54% this past year.

Achieving a high percentage of participation is essential to our continued success. It builds a strong culture of giving in which everyone shares in the satisfaction of supporting the whole, and it sends a strong and positive message to prospective families and potential donors that our mission is compelling and worthy of support. Our sincere thanks to all for getting us closer to our goal of 100% participation.

FACULTY

2009-2010

Sheila Akhavein
An Anglo
Margaret Arnold
Carol Baird
Ester Bak
Stephanie Bethel
Teresa Chi
Heather Clarkson
Natalie Danner
Aldo Evangelista
Kristin Finch
Natalia Fisher
Katherine Fordney
Stefanie Gschliesser
Nanci Guartofiero
Nimeesha Gupta
Jennifer Hoover
Nalli-Ann Horsford
Suzanne Hunton
Maiko Ishii
Eunyoung Kang
Thana Khouli
Janine Lai
Donna Longdon
Liz Lowy
Margot Mack
Robyn Mernick
Audrey Min
Samantha Muster
Brandi Norton
Marcia Polanco
Amanda Punsoda-Rodriguez
Nubia Ramirez
Neepa Raveshia
Kristen Scotese
Joan Shisler
Colette Taber
Mingma Ukyab
Melissa Vallo
Windy Wellington
Jocelyn Werst
Cheryl Zinn

ADMINISTRATIVE STAFF

2009-2010

Mmi Basso
Philip Bien
Becky Bonelli
Kevin Crook
Suzanne Day
Lorén DeNicola
Sarah Gillman
Barbara Grant
Natahia Kremer
Patricia Luciani
Melissa Mack
Michael Moran
Jonathan Toogood

20 WEST SIDE MONTESSORI SCHOOL – GREAT BEGINNINGS | FALL 2010 | WWW.WSMSNYC.ORG
Every year the Parents Association of West Side Montessori School invites all WSMS parents to jump in and get involved, and every year the response is amazing. 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 PA co-chairs, Jae Lee and Chad Gifford, set the tone by assembling an energetic, creative, and hardworking group of committee chairs and class representatives, whose names you see here. This substantial list of volunteers constitutes only a small percentage of the countless parents who sold raffle tickets, lent a hand before and after school events, hosted class dinners, and so much more. Our heartfelt thanks to all of you.
Parents Association 2009–2010

PA CO-PRESIDENTS
Chad Gifford
Jae K. Lee

FAMILY FUN
Book Fair
Marie Amerasinghe
Vivian Kuan

Bulb Planting
Janice Kambara
David Liebowitz

Grandparents and Special Visitors Day
Sarah Mallette-Loewenstein
Amy Tarr

Pumpkin Picnic
Alex España
Martha Genieser

Spring Picnic
Maura Duffy
Hilary Love

INFORMATION AND PUBLICATIONS
Bulletin Boards
Regina Buckley
Natalie Ryan

Independent School Panel
Melissa Hilfers

Monthly Memo
Olivia Kim

School Photos
Gina Larucci

Yearbook
Lisa Armstrong

Jennifer Bowles
Anjali Johannessen
Sasha Nemecek

CLASS REPRESENTATIVES
Coordinator
Kristen Chae Arabadjiev

Garden
Soledad Infantino
Terrence McNulty

1Wam
Pamela Graf
Nyla Islam

1Wpm
Lisa Demas-Goldsmith
Janice Kambara

2E
Robin Alston
Elise Berkman

2Wam
Aileen Hefferren
Lisa Rumore

2Wpm
Elizabeth Gonzalez
Abigail Maxey

3E
Amy Gould
Karinn Sammann

3W
Olivia Kim
Alicia McGill

4E
Ellen Grier
Corinne McClure

4W
Kat Olin
Annika Pergament

LAP
Robin Alston
Jessica Goldfarb
In celebration of last year’s gorgeous, environmentally friendly renovations at WSMS, the theme of the 41st Annual Auction was “Going Once, Going Twice, Going GREEN!,” and the event was a tremendous success by every measure. The Decorations Committee outdid themselves, creating a party space that was as festive as it was “green,” complete with adorable “flower” photos of our children sprouting from centerpieces of real grass. The band Dead Mile Dance (featuring WSMS dad Brian McFarland on drums) kept the atmosphere jumping with rock classics from the ’70s, while C. Hugh Hildesley of Sotheby’s was masterful as always in his ability to cajole, amuse, and charm bidders into raising their paddles again and again. Most of all, the Auction was a wonderful opportunity for WSMS parents and friends to get together and have a great time, all in support of the school’s Financial Aid Fund.

With so many fantastic items and so many ways in which to win them—the Live and Silent Auctions, the Raffle, and the increasingly popular Online Auction—the level of participation was terrific. In all, the Auction raised almost $153,000 for the Financial Aid Fund.

Co-Chairs Steve Bommarito and Morgan Thorne pulled together a talented and hardworking team of subcommittee chairs, and with incredible energy and camaraderie they all executed every aspect of the event flawlessly: organizing, recruiting, setting up, taking down, and, last but not least, soliciting contributions from parents, faculty, friends, and an impressive array of businesses ranging from local stores to A-list restaurants. We encourage you to patronize our supporters as a way of thanking them for their generosity.

Our sincere thanks go to Steve and Morgan, to the subcommittee chairs, and to everyone who donated their time, energy, financial resources, and so many wonderful auction items. Thanks to all those who so generously purchased Auction tickets for our teachers. A very special thank you to the WSMS faculty and to our children, who worked tirelessly to create the most coveted items of the evening: the classroom projects! Special thanks also to those on the faculty who donated their time and creativity to this year’s “teacher time” projects—Live Auction items featuring special activities for children to enjoy with the teachers. Thanks also to the school administration for all their help and support.
AUCTION
CO-CHAIRS
Steve Bommarito
Morgan Thorne

AUCTION
COMMITTEES

Auction Item Management
Michelle Babu

Banking
Kim Last
Larry Lytton
James Fong
Ali Kewfi
Ling Liu
Julie Schiffman

Bar & Catering
Noah Carlson
Mariane Liebowitz
Michelle Simmons
David Liebowitz

Catalog
Chad Gifford
Olivia Kim
Jennifer Achilles
Marie Amerasinghe
Victoria Arms
Margot Bridger
Dan Crisan
Cassandra Garbus
Henna Haque
Peter Hermann
Pamela Huson
Vivian Kuan
Jae K. Lee
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Sondra WuDunn

Class & Teacher Projects
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Decorations & Entertainment
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Glynnis Doucette
Abigail Maxey
Kerry Mendelson
Juana Ramos

Live Auction
Amy Middleton

Online Auction
Dipa Chandra
Melissa Hilfiers

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Set-Up
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Asif Siddiqi
Delis Soriano

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Jennifer Kell
Marte Rian
Anooradha Iyer Siddiqi
Kevin Snow
Marcia Stern
Frank Wolf

Note: Bold indicates committee chair
...we couldn’t have done it without you

Underwriting
Kristen and Boris Arabadjiev
Amina and Adil Badrous
Marsha and Leonard Bernstein
Kerry Mendelson and Carel Botha
Tina and S. Walter Bristol
Juana Ramos and Cecilio Castillero
Lauren McCollester and Evan Cornog
Alexandrina and David Eliezer

Betsy Morgan and Chad Gifford
Sarah Gillman
Amy and Kevin Gould
Hugh Levey and Claire Gruppo
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Mimi and Bob Basso
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Philip Bien
Teresa Chi
Heather Clarkson
Natalie Danner
Natalia Fisher
Katherine Fordney
Stefanie Gschliesser
Nanci Guartofiero
Jennifer Hoover
Nalli-An Horsford
Suzanne Hunton
Maiko Ishii
Janine Lai
Donna Longdon
Liz Lowy
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Melissa Vallo
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Cozy’s Cuts for Kids
James Beard Foundation
Martha Stewart Living
The New York Yankees
Omnimedia
Stone Barns Center and Blue Hill Restaurant
Urban Angler Ltd.
Teacher Time Projects

The 41st Annual Auction marked the second anniversary of the Teacher Time projects. Even though our teachers already devote an extraordinary amount of time and energy to the classroom projects for the Auction, many of them concocted additional auction items in the form of special outings for WSMS children! With their trademark enthusiasm and creativity, these teachers have, in effect, expanded the classrooms to encompass New York City and its endless educational—and fun!—opportunities. We are deeply grateful to our teachers for launching this rich new tradition, which provides not only exciting activities for a large number of our students, but additional donations to the school’s Financial Aid Fund.

A Day at the Guggenheim
Six children and eight teachers had a great time on this special guided tour of the Guggenheim Museum, followed by a hands-on workshop in the museum’s on-site children’s art studio.

Generously donated by: Margot Mack, Colette Taber, Joan Shisler, Heather Clarkson, Margaret Arnold, Mingma Ukyab, Windy Wellington, and Nalli-An Horsford

Ice Skating Adventure at Wollman Rink
Six children and five teachers braved the cold for some serious fun on the ice at Wollman Rink in Central Park.

Generously donated by: Liz Lowy, Mingma Ukyab, An Angelito, Kristen Scocese, and Stephanie Bethel

Bowling at Lucky Strike Lanes
Five teachers accompanied eight children to Lucky Strike Lanes, where they all bowled to their hearts’ content.

Generously donated by: Jennifer Hoover, Carol Baird, Philip Bien, Janine Lai, and Natalie Danner

Slumber Party in the Gym and Pancakes for Breakfast by the Bassos
This item was a hit in 2009, and this year was no different. Ten children got the chance to have a fun-filled sleepover...at school...with four teachers...and pancakes made by Mimi and Bob Basso the next morning!

Generously donated by: Natalia Fisher, Melissa Vallo, Suzanne Hunton, and Katherine Fordney; Mimi and Bob Basso; syrup donated by WSMS grandparents Donald and Betsy McKinley

Exploration at the Bronx Zoo
Six kids had the special treat of accompanying four of WSMS’s most nature-loving teachers to the one and only Bronx Zoo.

Generously donated by: Nanci Guartofierro, Marcia Polanco, Nubia Ramirez, and Joan Shisler

Museum of Art and Design (MAD)
This was a chance for eight children to check out the inside of that beautiful new building on Columbus Circle: the Museum of Arts and Design, filled with awe-inspiring craft, art, and design exhibits.

Generously donated by: Teresa Chi, Jocelyn Werst, Maiko Ishii, and Audrey Min

A Trip to the New York Transit Museum in Brooklyn Heights
We ride the bus or the subway all the time, but how much do we really know about urban public transportation? Six children accompanied three teachers to the New York Transit Museum in Brooklyn Heights to find out.

Generously donated by: Stefanie Gschliesser, Donna Longdon, and Robyn Mernick

Kid Chef for a Day
Six children got to don aprons and take over the school kitchen with the able assistance of three WSMS grown-ups. The result: a delicious dinner that the kids took home to share with their families.

Generously donated by: Margot Mack, Patricia Luciani, and Mimi Basso

Tea at Alice’s Teacup
This afternoon tea with three teachers at Alice’s was a hit in 2009, and this year was no different. Ten children got the chance to have tea with three WSMS grown-ups. The result: a delicious tea party!

Generously donated by: Samantha Muster, Sheila Akhavein, and Nalli-An Horsford
Maureen McDermott
Catherine McKinley
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Monique Nelson
Kat and Rob Olin
Marie Amerasinghe
and Doug Perlson
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The Schiffman Family
Elena and Benjamin Sim
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Alexandra Jarislowsky and
Kevin Snow
Meridith Sopher and Ted Stachtiaris
Kristin Johansen and Eric Stannard
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Vendors
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Lee Burnley
Canine Country Club
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Circle Line Cruises
Corbin’s Crusaders Sports Club
Craftbar
Dovetail
Eighthy One
Empire State Building Observatory
Exhale Spa
Faigé Timeless Portraits
Bobby Flay
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Genninger Studio
Gil Ferrer Salon
Natalie Goldshmidt, Nat Life Coaching
Greenstones
Harlem Vintage
Stepanka Horalkova
Hummmus Place
The Inn at Kent Falls, Kent, CT
Jazz at Lincoln Center
Jenny Craig
Kidville Upper East Side
Kim Bloomberg Designs
Kraft Inc.
Little Gym of Harlem
Lucky Strike Lanes
Magnolia Bakery
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The New York Jets
The New York Racing Association, Inc.
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The Parents League of New York
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Pilates Shop & Yoga Garage
Polkadot USA
Prenatal Yoga Center
Princeton Architectural Press “Rachael Ray”
Rack and Soul Restaurant
Reade Street Studio LLC
JC Renners
Revlon
Jeffrey Richards
Royal Barbershop
Sage Laser Center & Medi-Spa
Salon West
The Serene Spa
Seward & Kissel LLP
Soccer by Coach Fher
SocRoc
Stationery & Toy World
Story Pirates
Sue Barr Photography
Supermud
Tal Bagels
Tarr Technology Consulting
TCR (The Club of Riverdale) Treat
Truman’s Gentlemen’s Groomers
Sanjive Vaidya, Vaidya Stoltz Architects
West Side Taekwondo
Wollman Rink in Central Park

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Dr. Stuart Blankman and Dr.
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Blondi’s Hair Salon
Campo Italian Restaurant
Capture Yourself Photography
Carmine’s
Chelsea Piers

Citadel Trading Company
CitiBabes, Inc.
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Community Food and Juice
The Corner Cafe & Bakery
CPW
Crumbs
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Museum
Jade Nail Spa
Jeffrey Stein Salon
Knitty City
Kumon of Central Harlem
Kumon of the Upper West Side
Landmark Cleaners
Laytners’ Linen & Home
Lester’s, The Only Brand You
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Little Shop of Crafts
Magnolia Columbus Avenue LLC
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Make Meaning
Metro Framart
Mile Square Theatre
Music for Manhattan LLC
New York Sports Club
Norma’s at Le Parker Meridien
Hotel
Price Wise Discount
RARE by Ruth Roche
Robert Marc Opticians
Sammie and Tudie
Scholastic Inc.
SeamlessWeb
Shoe Tree
Silver Moon Bakery
Sitters Studio
Sura Restaurant
Top of the Rock
Toscana Shoe Repair
Town Shop
Via Veneto
Victorian Gardens at Wollman
Rink
West Side Montessori School
Wingspan Arts
Zabar’s
The morning of this year’s Spring Fair was not promising. An hour into the set-up shift, the skies opened up, drenching the tents, tables, and chairs set up along 92nd Street, not to mention the people who had volunteered to set up. Co-Chairs Faith Kewfi and Alison Schwartz marched resolutely up and down the street, assuring everyone that the showers would pass...and they did! Mere minutes before the Fair opened for business, the sun came out and a stiff wind blew away the puddles, making the rain a distant memory.

Children, parents, teachers, and neighbors flocked to 92nd Street for a fun-filled day of games, food, shopping, and entertainment. Kids had a ball getting their faces painted, posing for professional photos, decorating cupcakes, jumping their jiggles out on the Moonwalk, and, of course, getting a turn on the trolley. Adults found last-minute bargains at Second Hand Sue, perused the book sale and general store, and took their chances on the raffle. Kids and grown-ups alike loved the live music and the terrific food, from the burgers, hot dogs, and soul food to the always popular bake sale.

This year’s Spring Fair raised $20,632 for the WSMS Financial Aid Fund. Our heartfelt thanks go to Faith and Alison; to the dynamite team of subcommittee chairs they assembled, whose efforts made every aspect of the Fair run like clockwork; and to all who so generously donated their time, talent, and underwriting to help make this beloved annual WSMS family tradition such a huge success.

“THE FIRST ESSENTIAL FOR THE CHILD’S DEVELOPMENT IS CONCENTRATION. THE CHILD WHO CONCENTRATES IS IMMENSELY HAPPY.”

— M aria Montessori
SPRING FAIR
CO-CHAIRS
Faith Kewfi
Alison Schwartz

SPRING FAIR
COMMITTEE
CHAIRS
Bake Sale
Pamela Graf
Marty Haessler

Banking
Henna Haque
Ling Liu
Marc Thomas

Books
Melissa Birnbaum
Gilit Rosenberg

Child Care
Amalia Najera

Children’s Activities
Elise Berkman
Kate Elliott
Elizabeth Gonzalez

Drinks
Robin Alston
Nissa Booker

Food
Eliza Geer
Susan Talbert

General Store
Vivian Kuan
Mariane Liebowitz

Indoor Entertainment
Kerry Mendelson
Eleanor Wadsworth

Maze
Maura Duffy
Hilary Love

Moonwalk
Alexandra Jarislowsky
Sarah Kimball

Outdoor
Entertainment
Andrea Haddock
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Parking
Matthew Karchmer

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Second Hand Sue
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Security
Terrence McNulty

Set-Up
Chad Gifford
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Kim Bloomberg
Regina Buckley
Natalie Ryan

Spring Bulb
Planting
Olivia Kim
Brooke Reid

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Trolley
Kim Brooks
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The Fricklas Family
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Chad Gifford
Elizabeth Gonzalez
Pamela Graf
Andrea Haddock
Marty Haessler
Henna Haque
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Ali Kewfi
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Lenny's Bagels
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Whole Foods
Wollman Rink

**WSMS**
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Melissa Mack
Faculty and Staff of WSMS
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