



WINTER 2023 | VOL 2

Fox & Tree

A Newsletter for Friends of Wissahickon Charter School

A Note from Dean Kristi WCS Chief Executive Officer

Happy New Year! I hope that you were able to spend time around the holiday season resting and recharging with those close to your heart. This year, I am excited to look ahead to some of the many wonderful learning experiences that are on the horizon for our students, but I am most excited about the opportunities that will allow us to gather and celebrate in-person again. Over the coming weeks, our Wissahickon community will have the chance to attend our Honors' Ceremonies, Black Lives Matter Art Show, Women's Historm Month Celerations.



We are also excited to announce that, on Saturday, April 29th, we will once again host our Spring Benefit & Silent Auction at our Awbury Campus! The WCS Spring Benefit & Silent Auction brings our community together to support our unique educational model while honoring an individual who has had an especially meaningful impact on our community. This year I am pleased to announce that we will be honoring Ellen Lutz. Ellen was the founder and CEO of Clean Markets, and her passion for sustainability made her a perfect fit for the WCS Board of Trustees, on which she served from 2012 through 2017. Ellen has since devoted many hours volunteering with our kindergarten students at Forest School, and we are so grateful for her many contributions to WCS.

It is with great pleasure that I invite you to save the date to join us on Saturday, April 29th to celebrate Ellen AND Wissahickon.

Thank you, as always, for your incredible support!

Dean Kristi



We All Scream for ...Gelato!

It's never too cold to enjoy artisanal gelato! Students at our Awbury Campus were delighted when they received Cloud Cups gelato just before the Winter Break. John Wylie, WCS Board of Trustees member, generously introduced us to Cloud Cups owner Galen Thomas, who scooped up some creative flavors like eggnog and passion fruit for our kiddos - on the house! Thank you John and Galen for making this sweet treat happen!



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"We Take Care of the Earth
That Takes Care of Us"



Supporter Spotlight: Bill Sasso

When our friend Bill Sasso thinks of Wissahickon Charter, he says two words always come to mind: Community and Curiosity. These same two words could easily be used to describe Bill who, in addition to serving as Chairman Emeritus of law firm Stradley Ronon, continually finds time to give back to his community. His commitment to others has earned him numerous honors, most notably the William Penn Award, which is selectively bestowed to a Philadelphia business leader for outstanding contributions to the region. Just recently, Bill was appointed to Chair the Transition Leadership Board of Governor Josh Shapiro.



We are fortunate to share many common goals and values with Bill, who has provided consistent support for our programs over the years. WCS has received generous grant funding through Bill's charitable foundation, the Leo Niessen Jr. Charitable Trust, as well as yearly sponsorship support from Stradley Ronon ([Click here](#) to learn how you too can sponsor WCS!). Like us, Bill believes every child deserves high-quality, hands-on learning experiences and this belief shines through whenever we speak to him. He is a true thought-partner who always provides thoughtful questions and shows a sincere interest in our school!

We are so grateful for supporters like Bill, who make our work at Wissahickon possible. Thank you, Bill!

New Year, New Us

Fourth grade students at our Fernhill Campus took some time to reflect on 2022 and think about what they hope to accomplish in 2023.

In 2023, I want to...

- *Drink more water
- *Show more kindness to others
- *Develop a better sleep routine
- *Get a slime kit
- *Eat healthier
- *Save my money



All in the Family: Employees Turned Parents

At WCS, we prioritize partnerships with parents as part of our mission. Nowhere is this more evident than in our own hallways, where you can run into a WCS parent any day...on their way to class! We are proud to have numerous employees who are also WCS parents. Read the first part of our two part series to learn more about how four current employees valued the Wissahickon community so much, they wanted to have their children become part of it.*

Ralphy Sierra: Information Technology Manager

WCS employee Ralphy Sierra remembers the exact moment he knew he wanted to send his son, a current kindergartener, to Wissahickon. “I had the blinds in my office open and there were kids playing outside in the snow. To see the kids outside in the snow while at school amazed me. Schools don’t do that! But the kids at Wissahickon were tossing snow in the air and making snow angels and laughing! I wanted that for my child.” Mr. Ralphy says that his son loves to be outdoors, and like most children his age, has terrific energy. “Forest school is his favorite. Every Wednesday he wakes up excited to dress for Forest School. He thinks carefully about what to wear, asking, “Do I need my rainboots?” As the IT Manager at Wissahickon, Mr. Ralphy feels passionate about teaching kids to learn through technology. “Technology is a powerful tool and not just for social media. Content creation is a real field that kids can look into career-wise now. I want to empower them to use tech in ways that will expand their horizons when they graduate.”



Tiffany Days-Harris: Director of Operations

When Director of Operations Tiffany Days-Harris reflects on how she decided to enroll her daughter Charleigh, now a first grader, at WCS, Tiffany recalled loving Wissahickon’s environmental curriculum - in an urban setting no less - and wanting her daughter to be a part of it. “Charleigh loves dirt. She loves worms. She loves anything connected with nature. Going to Forest School excites her. Going outside is a big deal for her, and I love that she gets to do that here.” Days-Harris has always loved working with children, and her role at Wissahickon allows her to give back to a community that is similar to the one where she was raised. “I want people to know that WCS is really a caring family of individuals who want the best for our students and our children, and we want those children to have the experiences they truly deserve.”

So, just what is Forest School?

Both Charleigh and Xavier mentioned their enthusiasm for Forest School, but what is it? Forest School is a weekly environmental program for K-4th graders at our Awbury Campus. Students convene in the gated Adventure Woods at Awbury Arboretum to engage in authentic, inquiry-based, environmental learning. Amongst other things, students build animal shelters, swing from vines on the park trees, and investigate and identify insects! This is exactly the type of unique, holistic programming that is made possible by donors like you. Thank you!

*Wissahickon accepts students via a blind-lottery, meaning all applicants have equal chance of acceptance regardless of factors such as income, race, or academic performance. Only siblings of current students, children of founders and employees, and children of our current board of trustees are given preference in our lottery!

WCS Students Grow in the Great Outdoors

While some might shudder at the thought of spending nearly an entire week on the Appalachian Trail with a group of middle school students, for Fernhill Discovery Teacher Leah Wright, it's a beloved part of the job. Eighth graders at both WCS campuses participate in this 5 day, 4 night hiking and backpacking trip with Outward Bound Philadelphia. The Kate Svitek Memorial Expedition, as the trip is known, is the culminating experience in Wissahickon's Outdoor Program. And while these trips support our school's environmental mission, they also serve as a tool to build students' confidence, leadership skills, and curiosity. "They go into the trip not knowing how much they can accomplish," explains Mrs. Wright. "And they come out of the trip seeing their full potential."



Leading up to the Kate Svitek Memorial Expedition, Wissahickon's middle school students experience an array of outdoor experiences, which increase in duration and intensity over the years. Lower School students at WCS spend time taking day trips to local parks and arboretums. By fifth grade, WCS students participate in their first overnight trip to the College Settlement Camp, where they engage in activities that focus on team building and environmental education.

All of our Outdoor Program trips allow students to face new challenges and interact with their peers in unique ways. Students learn technical skills like navigation, backpacking, and rock climbing, while acting as part of a team to support their classmates. These experiences greatly influence the way students view themselves. Reflecting on the Expedition, one student told us, "This trip taught me to believe in myself and to try new things even if they seem scary."

Awbury Discovery teacher Liz Biagioli adds that, "one way or another, all of the kids who go on the (OBE) trip experience some level of growth. By day five, they are so proud of themselves and can reflect on how they have grown throughout the trip."

**"If you push yourself, you can do anything."
~Awbury 8th Grader**

Outdoor Program trips would not be possible without generous support from The Kate Svitek Memorial Foundation, The Hamilton Family Charitable Trust, EITC Donors, and supporters like YOU, who help our students reach new heights! Thank you!

