

KNIGHTLY NEWS

SPRING 2005

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WELCOME. I hope you enjoy this third edition of the Knightly News, your quarterly update on what is happening at the school and on our website (www.knighthallschool.org). In this issue you will find important suggestions for taking full advantage of parent-teacher conferences, and some ideas for enjoying the outdoors this spring with your family. There are important notices about dates you will want to save for Knight Hall School fun, and a spotlight article on playground safety. What else do you wish we would include? I invite you to let me know—in person, by phone or by email.

This newsletter is meant to help you, and we can best do that if you tell us what you are looking for! Happy Spring—*Martha*

PARENT-TEACHER CONFERENCES

Spring is a busy time at Knight Hall School as teachers prepare to synthesize and present 9 months of daily observations of your child. Careful preparation will help you get more out of the conference and gain a better understanding of what you can do to help your child succeed. Prior to your conference, we recommend you take a few minutes to think about and perhaps jot down questions to bring with you. You can look at parent-teacher conferences as your time to have a conversation about your child's development with professionals who know him or her. It's also a time to share concerns and triumphs. At Knight Hall each conference is scheduled for 45 minutes, which sounds like plenty of time, but we know that it's not nearly enough from a parent's point of view! The more organized your thoughts the better use you can make of this special time!

If they have not already, parents might consider telling teachers about significant changes in the child's life (such as the death of a pet, a sick grandparent, a divorce, or a family move), or important activities in which the child is involved.

Although there should be no big surprises, parent-teacher conferences are a good time to discuss any difficulties—either

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How Is My Child Doing?

Ask the most important questions first: including those about how you can help your child at home. Parents might consider asking some of the following sample questions adapted from those suggested by the National PTA:

- What is my child like during the day? Does he or she participate in class discussions and activities?
- What do you see as my child's strengths and weaknesses?
- How can I help him or her improve in areas that need work?
- What can I do at home to complement what is happening in the classroom?
- How does my child interact with other children and adults?
- Is my child trying as hard as he or she can?

You might also want to know:

- How do you accommodate differences in learning? What kind of learning works best for my child?
- What kind of information do you use to evaluate students?
- What skills and knowledge will my child be expected to master next year?

PARENT TEACHER CONFERENCES

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academic or behavioral—a child might be having at school. When this is the case, parents will want to

- Ask for examples.
- Ask what strategies seem to help at school.
- Develop an action plan that may include steps that parents can take at home and steps the teacher will take at school.
- Schedule a follow-up conference and decide on the best way to stay in touch (phone, e-mail, or letters sent to the home).
- It's a good idea to end the conference by reviewing what you discussed and restating your action plan.

Keeping in touch with the teachers, when things are going well and when issues arise, helps our children do better in school. When children know parents and teachers regularly work together, children see that education is a high priority requiring commitment and effort.

For more important tips for your spring conference, please read Martha's new message on the website at http://www.knighthallschool.org/martha_message/martha%2004-05.htm.

BETTER THAN ANY CLASSROOM: THE GREAT OUTDOORS

Spring is the perfect time to get outside with children—before the weather gets hot, the bugs get busy and the sunshine gets stronger. Getting out into the woods (or into nature along the beach or around a lake) really is better than any classroom for engaging children in many kinds of learning. Children are fascinated by all that they can see and discover for themselves outdoors. And with just a little guidance, your hiking trip can build muscles, refresh the spirit and lead to all kinds of new learning—from science to math to language arts. Below are some fun ideas for maximizing your learning adventures in the woods.

Scavenger Hunt

Make several lists of things you might see in the woods. The kids can help think of things. Include 8 to 10 items on each list. Each person gets a slightly different list, but there may be some overlap. The first person to spot all the things on his or her list gets to choose the resting spot, or wins some other small prize. Encourage even little children to cross off things on their own lists with your help. Here are some examples of things you might look for this spring:

- A maple leaf
- 3 kinds of buds
- A grasshopper
- An acorn
- Some mica
- 3 different color mushrooms
- Some moss
- A salamander
- A non-human footprint
- Three kinds of pinecones
- A spider

Treasure Hunt

This is a more open ended version of the above. Bring a special treasure bag—a cloth shoe bag or decorated paper bag—to fill with treasures you find along the way: Feathers, pinecones, special leaves and rocks. After the hike you can spread out your booty and see how much you can tell about each thing. Children might tell what they know about what it is or describe what they see in as much detail as they can. See if you can remember who found each thing and where. Later you might make a collage or mobile from your treasures to remember the trip. Or decorate a plain frame for a photo taken along the trail.

Make your own field guide

After your hike, draw pictures of things you saw along the way and label them—an oak tree, a spotted toad, a cricket.

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What to Bring on a Hike with the Kids

Water
 Snacks (fig bars, trail mix, fruit that is not too squishable) and/or a picnic lunch
 Band-aids
 Wipes for dirty hands and trailside pit stops
 A ziplock bag or two for carrying out garbage
 Extra clothing—for layers and in case of water accidents
Optional
 Camera
 Flashlight or headlamp
 Binoculars
 Magnifying glass
 Field guides for checking out insects, trees or birds

BETTER THAN ANY CLASSROOM: THE GREAT OUTDOORS

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Punch two holes in the paper on one side, reinforce the holes with tape, and tie some string or yarn through them to make a book. Include some blank pages in the book. Then bring your guide with you and see what new things you can add on the next hike. Collect a leaf or other field sample of plants observed as a reminder, and label the pages as you walk along so you can remember what to draw when you get home (or to the restaurant after the hike).

Kid-Friendly Hikes

One trick to ensure a good time in the woods with children is a built in reward or incentive to walk a little farther. The best hikes for kids are not too steep, not too long (our 5-year old can walk 3 miles in 1½–2 hours), and include something fun for them along the way. For example, there are at least 4 hikes in our area that include a “castle” at the top of the “mountain”. Most children love exploring caves and waterfalls, and when it gets a little warmer a lake or swimming hole for swimming or paddling is a great way to cool off. The gorgeous view that really takes our breath away as adults is often ho-hum for children and sometimes dangerous. And speaking of danger, don't forget this important **WARNING**: “Leaves of three, let it be!” The whole family should learn to spot and avoid poison ivy. Below are some hikes many families with young children find enjoyable. What are your favorite hikes? Please [click here](#) to let us know so we can share them in the next issue.



Plenty to see at West Hartford Reservoir...

Books to read before and after your hike:

The Ants Go Marching One by One
Kathleen Garry McCord (Santillana, 2002)

Walking Through the Jungle
Julie Lacome (Candlewick Press, 2003)

We're Going on a Bear Hunt
Michael Rosen (Simon & Schuster, 2003)

Willie Takes a Hike
Gloria Rand (Harcourt Brace & Company, 1996)

In the Woods: Who's Been Here?
Lindsay Barrett George (William Morrow & Company, 1996)

Castles:

Gillette State Park, East Haddam, CT—You can park on the other side of the Connecticut River and take the Chester Ferry across for an added boat ride adventure. <http://dep.state.ct.us/stateparks/parks/gillettecastle.htm>

Sleeping Giant State Park, Hamden, CT—See if you can see the sleeping giant along the ridge that gives the park its name. Kids enjoy playing in the castle at the top and the view is great. <http://dep.state.ct.us/stateparks/parks/sleepinggiant.htm>

Mt. Tom State Park, New Preston, CT—A little farther afield, but well worth it, as it has both a castle and a lake with a swimming area and a beach for cooling off after the hike. <http://dep.state.ct.us/stateparks/parks/mounttom.htm>

Castle Craig, Meriden, CT—At the bottom of the mountain is lovely Hubbard Park which includes a duck pond, picnic area and a little playground. Children are often fascinated to learn that the Hanging Hills of Meriden were formed by volcanoes 200 million years ago when dinosaurs still roamed the area. http://www.cityofmeriden.org/CMS/default.asp?CMS_PageID=155

Waterfalls and Other Water features:

Devils Hopyard State Park, East Haddam, CT—Are the holes on the rocks of the waterfalls really the work of the devil? Visit to see for yourself and decide what you think. <http://dep.state.ct.us/stateparks/parks/devilshopyard.htm>

Wadsworth State Park, Middletown, CT—Both Little Falls and Big Falls are impressive, and the entire hike is fairly flat

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BETTER THAN ANY CLASSROOM: THE GREAT OUTDOORS

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and family friendly. Be sure to click on the geology link at the below website for easy to recognize photos of columnar flows of basalt lava in the park for the volcano obsessed preschooler in your family. <http://dep.state.ct.us/stateparks/parks/wadsworth.htm>

Farmington Valley Greenway, Collinsville, CT—There are many greenways popping up in our area, but just near the old ax factory buildings in the center of Collinsville is a convenient

place for exploring the Farmington River. The market across the street is a pleasant and convenient place to stop for a snack after walking. <http://www.fvgreenway.org/index.php>

West Hartford Reservoir, West Hartford, CT—Last but not least, for convenience alone the West Hartford reservoir is a wonderful place for hiking and biking. You'll find streams and lakes, both paved and unpaved places to explore, and many types of pine cones. <http://www.themdc.com/talcottmountain.htm>

PLAYGROUND SAFETY

A recent article in Childcare Exchange* reviews the results of the National Program for Playground Safety (NPPS) national survey of playgrounds. The article describes the kinds of equipment found in child care centers across the United States, compares them with the findings of their last survey in 2000, and then describes the safety of the equipment and the surfacing. The authors' suggest several principles for child care centers in creating safe play areas for children. These suggestions include:

- Select equipment that conforms to modern standards such as those of the American Society of Testing and Materials Standards (ASTMS). Knight Hall play structures all conform to such standards.



Playing it safe at KHS...

Tips for Limiting Sun Exposure

Play equipment is not the only hazard on the playground. While it is healthy for our children to get outside in the fresh air and sunshine each day, too much sunshine can also be a problem. Now that spring is here, we ask that your child start the school day with sunscreen and that you leave some sunscreen in his or her cubby so that we can reapply it in the afternoon. Sunglasses and a hat are also suggested as the warmer weather approaches. In addition, Knight Hall School follows the below tips from the NPPS, which you might also find helpful at home.

1. Avoid peak sun intensity hours. As the sun moves higher in the sky, the sun's rays become more intense and damaging to the skin and eyes. This is because the ultraviolet (UV) light travels a shorter, more direct distance to reach the Earth. The peak sun intensity hours, when UV light is strongest, are 11 a.m. and 4 p.m. daylight savings time. At KHS, we generally plan children's outdoor activities for early morning and late afternoon when the sun's rays are less intense. By avoiding sun exposure during peak hours, sun exposure may be reduced by as much as 60%.
 2. Provide adequate shade. Shade can help protect children from the sun. Knight Hall carefully and lovingly maintains the trees in the front and back playgrounds in appreciation not only for their beauty and the science-related learning experiences they provide, but also for their much appreciated shade value.
- Select age-appropriate equipment for each age group. While the NPPS suggests separating age groups of 2-5 from 5-12, Knight Hall provides separate play space and equipment appropriate to younger toddlers of 1-2, while the preschoolers enjoy more challenging equipment and

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PLAYGROUND SAFETY

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larger areas to explore.

- Surfacing under the equipment needs to be maintained regularly at a depth appropriate to the height of the equipment. This is one of the most important aspects of a safe playground as over 70% of injuries are the result of falls to the surface from play equipment. The play structures at Knight Hall school are well under the suggested limit of 6 feet for ages 2-5, but still provide ladders to climb, poles to slide down, and tall towers to change perspectives and spark young imaginations. The non-splintering play grade mulch under the equipment is well-maintained at least twice per year.

At Knight Hall, we are glad to see that our outdoor play areas are consistent with these best practices. There are

KHS NEWS

Pixie Announces Her Retirement!

Since 1978 when she moved to Hartford, Pixie Thomas has played many roles at Knight Hall School—substitute, parent volunteer, and even interim director, and she filled each role with her hallmark excellence. But her impressive talents shine brightest as the defining force behind Knight Hall School's 4-year old program. "Pixie's leaving will force us to recreate our entire 4-year old program," laments Knight Hall Director, Martha Wylie. "No one can fill her shoes." And yet this fall, another teacher will help rebuild the 4-year

Save the Date:

Pixie Palooza, Saturday June 18th

In honor of Pixie and her longstanding commitment to learning through play, the board of directors at Knight Hall School is planning a special evening of fun for parents and children alike at the Connecticut Science Center. Come join with Knight Hall families past and present to say goodbye to Pixie and thank her for her special contributions to Knight Hall School. Whether your children have spent time in the orange room or not, this will be a worthwhile way to spend the evening with your family. Everyone is invited, including alumnae families, so spread the word. Feel free to make copies of the reply cards enclosed in your invitation. There will be lots of food and special activities for the children. For more information or to find out how you can help, contact [Martha](#) or [TJ Jones](#). Send in your reply cards today.

4 playgrounds at Knight Hall, reflecting our historical commitment to the idea that children learn a great deal from opportunities to explore the outside world around them. As mentioned above, the front playgrounds are divided up developmentally for toddlers and preschoolers. Both are shady and include trees and grass and lots of areas to explore and dig. The back playgrounds are also divided into 2 areas. Both are appropriate for either developmental group to use, but only one group uses the back at any one time. In the back, children may choose to use trikes, scooters and pedal or riding cars on the hardtop, or they may dig and play in the sandy area. If you have questions about playground safety at Knight Hall School, please let me know—*Martha*

**Thompson, D., Hudson, S., and Olsen, H. (2005, March/April). Safe playground equipment for early childhood programs. Exchange. Pp. 20-23.*



Pixie Thomas

old program. And with Ann's training and experience it will be done in a way that lives up to Pixie's high standards, imaginative creativity, and cheerful good sense.

"Pixie is impressively competent." Martha goes on, "one of the most talented preschool teachers I have ever come across. She is a mentor, a friend and an inspiration." And though her talent has been recognized with an important award from the Hartford Area Collaborative, Pixie is uncomfortable with such recognition, preferring instead to point out the importance of collaboration in teaching. In purely Pixie style

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KHS NEWS

Pixie Announces Her Retirement! *cont.*

when asked about leaving, Pixie quoted Rachel Carson's *The Sense of Wonder*. "If a child is to keep alive his inborn sense of wonder... he needs the companionship of at least one adult who can share it, rediscovering the joy, excitement and mystery of the world we live in." Pixie then goes on, "It has been my great privilege to constantly rediscover the wonders of our world along side your children. Many thanks to all the children, parents, teachers, and directors who have been part of my life at Knight Hall School. I have learned so much from all of you. Being a teacher at Knight Hall School has truly been 'an expedition of exciting discovery.'"

Pixie plans to retire to a new life of discovery and adventure! She and her husband, Rich, are planning to travel to spots they have not in the past had to time to see. They also plan to work on their beautiful Victorian home. Retirement means time for the 2 of them together. Pixie will be sorely missed at Knight Hall School. She will be missed by the parents who value her insight and advice. She will be missed by her fellow teachers who appreciate her collaboration and wisdom. But mostly she will be missed by the children who love her wonderful easy laugh, her understanding, and her heartfelt "good for you" at each of their daily triumphs.

For more about Pixie and Knight Hall's other impressive staff members, go to <http://www.knighthallschool.org/staff.htm>.

SAVE THE DATE: Family Picnic Wednesday June 15th

DON'T FORGET the annual KHS family picnic will be held in the usual grassy spot by the playgrounds at Beachland Park in West Hartford. Bring your dinner and a blanket and take a little time to enjoy the longer evenings watching the children play and talking with Knight Hall families and staff. Knight Hall mugs and t-shirts will be on sale!

Tag Sale Update

THANK YOU to all of you who signed up to contribute to the Knight Hall School tag sale. Unfortunately there was not enough interest to hold the tag sale this year. Instead, the tag sale is being planned for NEXT spring—May of 2006. So please save those tag sale items and plan to bring them to the school next year. All gently used toys, books, children's and household furniture, etc. are welcome. If you have any questions, please contact Martha.

State Inspector Impressed by KHS

Every 3 years Knight Hall receives an unannounced visit from a state inspector, in order to maintain its state license and its NAEYC accreditation. These inspectors check all areas and aspects of the school in order to protect the safety and the well-being of our children. They make sure the school is clean and free of hazards, that a head teacher is always on the premises, and that all the staff all have up to date first aid and CPR credentials. They also check to ensure the teachers are keeping up with required professional development.

Last month an inspector who had never visited the school performed the state inspection. She was impressed by the school, the children's activities and by the staff. This seemed to explain to her something she said amazed her. Before visiting, she said she could not believe that since 1929, not one complaint had been lodged against the school. In her experience this is unprecedented. Knight Hall's blemish-free record is a testament to our ongoing commitment to high quality care for our children.

Knight Hall Work Day a Success

This past Saturday May 14th, a lot was accomplished although only a few parents were available to help. The following people helped move 5 tons of sand and 25 yards of mulch. They replaced ceiling tiles and light bulbs, installed window air conditioners in the toddler rooms, washed doors and walls, and painted the staff bathroom: Eve Wemett, David Kozak, TJ Jones, Bill Bailey, Dean Nichols, Ross Bunnell, Perry Zinn-Rowthorn, Marlene Smith, and Jason Meilcareck. The following children were also BIG helpers; Jackson Zinn-Rowthorn, John Kozak, Beckett Zinn-Rowthorn and Maitland Bailey. Thank you to all of you for giving of your time and your energy. The school looks great and all our children will be safer and happier because of your important support of Knight Hall School.

WEBSITE NEWS

COMING SOON: The Neighbors' page

Did you know that TJ Mulch provided last year's playground mulch at cost, or that Barb's pizza provides the Orange room with free pizza boxes for their yearly portfolio projects? Knight Hall School has good neighbors that support the school in

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WEBSITE NEWS

COMING SOON: The Neighbors' page *cont.*

many ways. As fellow supporters of Knight Hall, we should know who they are and support them whenever we can. To keep you informed on what businesses, organizations and good people are supporting our mission to create a stimulating, non-judgmental environment that promotes self-discovery and learning through play, we are creating the Knight Hall School Neighbor's page. To submit your business for posting, [click here](#). Visit often to see who else is supporting the school. Check here first when you need a service or a new store, and be sure to patronize KHS' good neighbors!

New Virtual Tour

<http://www.knighthallschool.org/about.htm>.

The web-based tour of the school—a revolving slide show of photos taken in each room and the playgrounds set to music—is up and running. There are no children in these photos, as the tour is posted to the public site. But the rooms are at their warm and inviting best. This is a great way to share your children's learning environment with others who are not close enough to visit, or as an introduction if someone you know is looking for a placement for their own children in the area. Check it out!

NEW LINKS

Below are a few of the helpful new links posted to the resources pages. Go to www.knighthallschool.org/links.htm for the complete list. If your favorite family site is not there, please email wendy@knighthallschool.org and share it with the Knight Hall community.

Travel Fun Ideas

<http://www.momsminivan.com/toddlers.html>

Planning a road trip? MomsMinivan.com has over 101 ideas for fun things for kids to do in the car. How about scavenger hunts or car trip bingo? Or aluminum foil art creations? The site includes kids travel game ideas, printable activity sheets, and links to related sites and products. You can also find information on car seat safety, and lots of road-trip tips. The

site is organized by age group to make it easier to find what you need for your trip. Whether you will be in the car for 30 minutes or 30 hours, there's something for everyone! Thanks to Clay's mom in the yellow room for this site suggestion!

International Children's Digital Library

<http://www.icdlbooks.org/>

Literature is perhaps society's best means for exposing young hearts and minds to new ideas. Engaging stories help children grow intellectually and emotionally, and inspire youngsters to explore the world around them. The International Children's Digital Library (ICDL) is funded by the National Science Foundation (NSF) and the Institute for Museum and Library Services (IMLS). This digital collection of international children's books reflects similarities and differences in cultures, lifestyles, and priorities of people around the world. The collection focuses on books that help children understand the global society in which they live, in order to increase tolerance and acceptance. Take some time to read some of these wonderful full color digital books. The readers are easy to use and the range of international books is fascinating.

Healthy Eating Resource

<http://www.nutrition.gov>

Nutrition.gov provides links to databases, recipes, interactive tools and all kinds of nutrition-related information for infants and children, adult women and men and seniors. The site is maintained by a team of registered dietitians and nutrition information specialists at the Food and Nutrition Information Center of USDA's National Agricultural Library (NAL), in cooperation with scientists and professionals at the USDA, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, and many other partners. It includes links to information on the Food Guide Pyramid, Dietary Guidelines for Americans, dietary supplements, fitness, and how to keep food safe. You can find helpful guides to portion size, interactive tools to help you assess your diet and physical activity status, information about what foods contain which nutrients, and much more.