

TPS Headlines

November 16, 2007

From Amy Purcell Vorenberg
Head of School

City Country Classroom at 35

*Listen to the wind in the trees
And the sound of the streams
We'll hear their song as we work and play
'Cause Earth Day is Every Day
Earth Day is Every Day.**

The Philadelphia School celebrated its 35th birthday on September 19th amidst a sea of green. For this year – and this year only – we have traded our classic red t-shirts for green ones, as we embrace the next 35 years and beyond with recommitted efforts toward our mission to empower our students as stewards of the environment. Yes, “TPS goes green!” is more than a logo on a t-shirt; it’s the all-school theme for our 35th year as we honor “Earth Day, Every Day.”

Both here at TPS and out at Shelly Ridge, our students – from our youngest preschoolers to our oldest Middle Schoolers – have been active, practicing environmental scientists this fall. Our preschoolers, on their way back from the park the other day, happened upon some tree surgeons climbing high into the trees to cut off large branches. The children spent the next day examining the seeds, leaves, and bark from branches of a Japanese pagoda tree that the tree surgeons had given them to bring back to school. Junior Unit students have been visiting local farms as part of their exploration of issues surrounding the concept of eating locally. Middle School students, in keeping with TPS tradition, are in the midst of compiling herbaria (formerly known as leaf projects!) that include fully described leaf specimens, botanical drawings, and essays.

This reaffirmation of our founders’ commitment to environmental education coincides with a momentous occasion in the life of our school, one that represents a firm recommitment to our school’s urban setting. This month the Philadelphia City Council approved the sale of a city-owned property at 2501-15 South Street to The Philadelphia School. The property, which will become home to our early education program, will secure our school’s future in Center City, providing us much-needed space to stretch our program in exciting and innovative ways.

Our newly hired architectural firm, Purdy O’Gwynn, has begun to work with us to develop plans for the site. Inspired by the school’s motto “City Country Classroom,” the plans will incorporate green building practices, as well as landscape design elements – gardens, trees, and water – that offer learning opportunities for students of all ages. We guarantee that future TPS children will be able to tend gardens both at Shelly Ridge and right here in Center City.

As The Philadelphia School reaches a healthy and vigorous middle age, there is no doubt that much has changed since September 19, 1972, when 14 children entered the school’s two rented rooms at Rodeph Shalom Synagogue on Broad Street. And, yes, much has changed since we moved into our current building in 1976. Yet the most fundamental and guiding principles of The Philadelphia School’s founding mission – educating our students to be thoughtful, responsible, and active stewards of the urban and natural environments – is as valued today as it was 35 years ago.

I imagine TPS in another 35 or 40 years. When TPS turns 75, perhaps I will return for the celebration – as I will *only* be in my eighties! I can picture our current building, with lots of green around the edges. I can see our new facility, surrounded with mature plantings and flowering trees and welcoming visitors who enter Center City across the South Street Bridge. And I can see a gathering of alumni, by then over 1,500 strong, uniting in song – “I’m not perfect, and I know I never will be. . . .” Or perhaps they will joyfully sing our new song, “Earth Day is Every Day.”

Happy 35th Birthday, TPS. And many more.

**Excerpt from "Earth Day is Every Day," music and lyrics by Primary Unit teacher Raji Malik*

2501 Lombard Street • Philadelphia • Pennsylvania • 19146 • www.tpschool.org