

\$8.00

FEBRUARY 2023

Vol. 29 No. 1

TOMORROW'S CHILD



**Montessori
Family Alliance**

30TH ANNIVERSARY EDITION

... other NBA players
get to the top of their sport!

GRADES 2-3 AGES 7-9



THE OWL'S NEST

Omni Montessori School's Unique Owl's Nest Treehouse Library

by Hannah Earnhardt, Omni's Director of Development, Omni Montessori, Charlotte, NC

“THE THINGS HE SEES ARE NOT JUST REMEMBERED; THEY FORM A PART OF THE SOUL.” –MARIA MONTESSORI

If you listen carefully, the echoes of children's laughter compliment the crunching of the fallen leaves scattered across the forest floor as you make your way through the Omni Montessori School (Omni) Blakeney campus. Nestled among the trees, at the center of the property, a wise owl peers through the branches with a welcoming demeanor. The clomping of small boots makes their way up the wooden ramp to the Owl's Nest; a treehouse plucked straight from the pages of a fairytale. Grasping the iron handles and pushing through the wooden doors, the sweet aroma of pine, cedar, and other locally sourced woods float through the air. Lovingly crafted shelves lined with books, greet students, and provide access to unlimited worlds. Like an owl's habitat, the treehouse is a space of comfort for the Omni students – an enchanting place to grow and to explore.

LABOR OF LOVE

Such a structure doesn't miraculously appear; it was a true labor of love. In 2016, Omni Montessori School embarked on an adventure with Animal Planet's Treehouse Masters. At that time, Alan Gardner, was an Omni parent and Board of Trustees President, and he envisioned the treehouse library concept after working with Pete Nelson and the Treehouse Masters team on a treehouse guest house at his Waxhaw, North Carolina property.

Translating the Owl's Nest vision from a concept to a reality would require many hands and giving hearts, so during the 2016 Omni

Montessori School Annual Auction, Alan and Gwen Gardner approached fellow Omni family, DJ, and Maureen Baudhuin with the idea of the Owl's Nest. DJ Baudhuin recalls discussing the need for space for a library and the group collectively agreed how wonderful it would be for the school to have a library treehouse. For the Baudhuins, their financial support was an easy decision. In Maureen Baudhuin's view, "we are forever grateful for having this Montessori wonderland for our kids and for us too. So, it was always very natural, of course, that we were going to help in anyway or donate."

Following the initial conversation with the Baudhuins, Alan Gardner reached out to Pete Nelson and presented the idea for the Owl's Nest. DJ Baudhuin recalls, "it was less than a month from when Alan made the call that Pete was walking around the [Omni property] looking for a place to do it." Within six months from the start of the conversation the project began. Reflecting on the endeavor, Pete Nelson stated, "Anytime we can create a treehouse that is open to a broader group of people, we get excited. In this case, a treehouse library for Omni Montessori School - could anything be better than that?"

With any project, there can be obstacles. Alan Gardner recalls the various ups and downs of creating such a spectacular space. "It started with the generous offer from Maureen and DJ Baudhuin with what we expected would be the total cost of the treehouse, but we did not realize how difficult it would be to get the

building permits from Mecklenburg County for a private school." After dozens of meetings with the county planners, there were shifts in the plans and the overall costs. Alan Gardner stated, "there were some tough discussions, but the result was that the Baudhuins, Pete Nelson, and Gwen and I ultimately decided we had to step up to cover the difference. At times I thought we would not make it to the finish line, but in the end it worked."

What would normally take years to complete, all came together through the vision and support of individuals committed to empowering children in a community faithful to the teachings of Maria Montessori. As Maureen Baudhuin perfectly stated, "it was definitely written in the stars."

SPECIAL FEATURES

While the exterior of the Owl's Nest feels like something out of a fairytale, the interior is just as magical. The bookshelves are made from locally sourced wood from around the Charlotte area. Establishing roots within nature is an important aspect of Montessori education and trees are a connecting piece throughout the Omni Blakeney campus. Gwen Gardner recalls, "the Primary children would come out to visit our farm where they loved to play on a swing that hung from a big red oak tree. The tree eventually died, and we took it down, but kept the lumber. When they were building the treehouse, Pete came out to our farm to specifically select the wood to craft some of the bookshelves in the treehouse."

The attention to detail and commitment to using materials from within the community further amplifies the love that is thread throughout the Owl's Nest.

Along with the individualized bookshelves, the sitting area is inspired. Pete Nelson was committed to integrating aspects of surprise throughout the Owl's Nest stating, "the exterior was fashioned in the form of a wise owl, and that curved 'face' led to the creation of an interior sitting area shaped and highlighted in a Fibonacci curve." With support from the Omni Parent Association to ensure the addition of the spiral shelves and seating, students can peer out of the large windows that overlook the outdoor stage, while simultaneously basking comfortably in the natural light with a good book. Inspiration was flowing during the development of the Owl's Nest, and it continues to inspire the Omni community.

LASTING IMPACT

Maria Montessori believed, "the goal of early childhood education should be to activate the child's own natural desire to learn." With a space like the Owl's Nest, Omni students

are sparked with continuous curiosity. Darcy McDonnell, Librarian and Aftercare Specialist, sees the impact of the Owl's Nest daily. According to Darcy, "our Owl's Nest treehouse library provides students with a peaceful, cozy nook to browse, seek out resources for their work, and cuddle up to read. As they enter, students often remark that they love the cedar scent, and the intimate setting helps younger students feel comfortable exploring books."

Over the last six years, students have walked in and out of the doors of the treehouse with



their giggles wafting from under the doorframe as smiles permanently stretch across their faces while burying their noses in literary adventures. Looking back on the development of the Owl's Nest, DJ Baudhuin emphasized that "we wanted to do things for the kids and wanted to give back. At the time there was a need for a library structure. This was creative and whimsical. We thought it would be fun for the kids." The work of the Baudhuins, the Gardners, Pete Nelson and his team, the Parent Association, as well as the Omni Board of Trustees, has created an enduring and endearing place that will continue to inspire students for years to come. ■



Hannah Earnhardt is the Director of Development with a demonstrated history of working in the primary/secondary education industry and various nonprofits. Hannah is skilled in Programming, Non-profit Fund Development, Management, Leadership Development, and Marketing. She's a strong community and social services professional with a Master's degree focused in Public Administration from University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

 **The Montessori Library**

Access Montessori videos, albums, and other resources for as little as \$7/month!

MONTessorILIBRARY.COM