

### Reminders...

...make sure you turn in your registration forms as soon as possible to reserve your spot for the 2008-09 school year.  
...Open House will be next Thursday, March 6. Stop by anytime between 6:30 and 7:30pm to visit the rooms and see what the children have been doing. Visit with teachers and other families currently in the program.  
...please keep us in mind next year for Family Night (see the attached flyer listing all of our generous donors). You don't have to have a child in the program to attend, volunteer or to donate!

### Nature Explore™ Family Club 2008 Calendar

(all events 10:30AM-Noon)  
March 15... Wilderness Park  
April 12... Holmes Lake Park  
May 10... Arbor Day Farm Picnic following

### Bookshelf

*Annie and the Wild Animals* by Jan Brett

*The Billy Goats Gruff* fairy tale by various authors

*Caps for Sale* by Esphyr Slobodkina

*Daddy Makes the Best Spaghetti* by Anna Grossnickle Hines

*Dinah's Egg* by Lee Lorenz

*First Snow in the Woods* by Carl R. Sams and Jean Stoick

*Gingerbread Boy* by Jan Brett

*How Far Will a Rubberband Stretch?* by Richard Thaler

*I Love Hugs* by Lara Jones

*I See a Song* by Eric Carle

*I Spy: An Alphabet in Art* by Lucy Micklethwai

*Madeline* by Ludwig Bemelmans

*Mama, Do You Love Me?* by Barbara Jooisse

*The Mitten* by Jan Brett

*Mushroom in the Rain* by Mirra Ginsburg

*Snowballs* by Lois Ehlert

*Song of the Water Boatman: & Other Pond Poems* by Joyce Sidman

*Stranger in the Woods* by Carl R. Sams and Jean Stoick

*The Three Little Pigs* fairy tale by various authors

*Two Eyes, A Nose And A Mouth* by Roberta Intrater

*Where the Wild Things Are* by Maurice Sendak

## Prairie adventures continue in class

By Natalie Ragland and Joyce White, Teachers

"Stranger in the Woods," a book by Carl R. Sams and Jean Stoick, has been the focus of our small group time and music and movement time this winter. Although the book takes place in the forest, we interchange the word Prairie on occasion because of our Spring Creek Prairie field trip experiences this fall.

After becoming familiar with the story, the children took a closer look at the animals living in the forest/prairie. We **looked** at pictures in books and manipulated animal puppets that might live in the forest/prairie. We **moved** our bodies in interesting ways to imitate the animals. We painted our faces to embody the animals in the forest/prairie. Then we **sketched** ourselves as animals using both mirrors and images in books.

We were excited to find animal tracks in the snow this month. This created an interest in paths, habitats and identifying animal tracks. Many children **sketched** animal tracks. We even created pathways to travel on as a pack of animals.



### Infant Room Notes...

contributed by Kris Sieckmeyer-Hajny, Joleen Podtburg and Denise Topil, Teachers

February and Valentine's Day gave the Infant Room a fun way to work on their fine motor skills by gluing and manipulating hearts. Did you see any of their fanciful artwork?

We are all looking forward to March and warmer weather. It's been too cold to go outside but the gym has been a wonderful space to explore. Allison and Carson (top picture shows Carson) spend their time climbing on the mats and riser blocks. Jack (bottom) enjoys dinosaurs.

We try to spend as much as one-on-one time as we can reading with the children and encourage you to continue their reading experiences at home. A favorite book this month is "I Love Hugs."

Our action intensified as we added music to the animal movements. Using rhythmic instruments, such as chimes, rain sticks and drums, the experience became child-directed. Giving attention to detail and sound through their movement, the children created an incredible masterpiece.



How did the children feel about their complex thinking and creative freedom? *Moving to music makes my heart feel...*

...like a rainbow pony

...happy

...like time goes really fast

...sad when I stop dancing and playing instruments



Some of the skills our young creative movement experts practiced were...

Layering of literacy

Visual memory

Small and Large motor skills

Rhythm

Initiative

Creative Representation

Science

Personal space

Body awareness

Solo

Duet

Trio

Audience

Level change

Positive and Negative space

Musicology



L-R: Cooper W., Gavin D., Gina H., Katie P., Lauren B., and, in back, Graham P.

Mrs. Van Laningham's class fed red wiggler worms by sprinkling layers of shredded newspaper, alfalfa pellets, coffee grounds, and a sprinkling of room-temperature water over the six-foot metal tank.

We take care of the worms and the worms help make plant food for our greenhouse and garden plants.

contributed by Holly Murdoch, Teacher



Gary Schuerman, Head Building Manager of First-Plymouth Congregational Church, paid a visit to Ms. Ragland's class January 20th. He introduced various tools. "All of these tools are tools that pinch," he told the children. They examined wrenches, pliers, etc.

Mr. Schuerman was kind enough to answer the children's questions. He then took time to listen to their stories as they told him what they know about tools. Anika J. explained and demonstrated to Gary the difference in wrench sizes. She found the biggest and the smallest. Before he left the class he asked the children, "What tools would you like me to bring next time?" Their eyes lit up as they contemplated his next visit.

*contributed by Joyce White, Teacher*



*Kayla F., age 4*

### Request...

...Have any of you noticed the bird feeders outside of the south room window? Students have been showing a lot of interest in birds at this time of year and several feeders were donated to us. If anyone would like to help with our seed supply it would be welcomed! The birds who have been visiting us are especially attracted to the following kinds of seed:

- cracked corn
- finch food
- hulled sunflower seed
- mixed seed
- safflower
- thistle
- white millet

*contributed by Holly Murdoch, Teacher*



*Ty H., age 5*

## Winter great backdrop for learning



*By Kris Van Laningham, Teacher*

We are watching many squirrels and birds feed outside of our window. The children have been fascinated by the ways animals go about finding their meals. If you are interested in supplying birdseed or food that would attract squirrels (corn, etc.), send it with your child and we will put it in the feeder or on the tree stump outside. We are also learning to identify different birds by their coloring and their sounds. Gavin can make an amazing owl call and Gina has a morning dove coo exactly right!

Our recent trip to Spring Creek Prairie was amazing. The fresh snowfall was very inviting and the first thing we did was see how our own tracks looked as we left the building...our guide had everyone start walking at the same time. Then the smooth snow called our name to create snow angels (I got to make one)!

Tracks in the snow were a highlight of the day... ask your child if they remember any animals that might have left tracks (fox, mice, maybe a deer). Some of the children found a tunnel. Deb, our guide, told us it might have been a groundhog's burrow. She had us make our own tracks with models of feet from animals that she carried with her. Children loved making their own tracks and Gavin made his own "bear tracks" by crawling on all fours!

Gina was determined to make a snowman. She rolled snow at every possible moment. One huge ball was almost to her waist and Katie helped her push it uphill. Katie exclaimed "The deer will be happy about this!" I asked her what she meant and she explained that Deb taught us how deer pawed at the snow so they could get to the green grass to eat and the snowball was exposing the green grass. (Earlier we had pretended to be deer and paw at the snow with our mittens.) Many children experimented with picking up the biggest snowball they could carry.

Deb had us kneel in a circle and listen to the sounds around us. Gavin heard the prairie grass, another child heard nylon (snow gear), someone else heard a bird and we all heard the distant sound of

traffic. It was a perfect day to experience winter on the prairie!

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We have two students working with our class. Mrs. Mohammed is from Sudan and working on her Early Childhood degree through Southeast Community College. She will be translating our "Friends" song into Arabic so we will be singing in another language! Miss Heibel is working with Mrs. Murdoch and she is graduating from Concordia College after her student teaching experience. It is wonderful to have caring adults work with your children.



As an extension of Music and Movement experiences centered around prairie animals, Katie P., age 5, worked carefully to paint herself as a Monarch Butterfly.

*contributed by Holly Murdoch, Teacher*

*Newsletter photos by Holly Murdoch, Beth Pauley, Kris Sieckmeyer-Hajny, Kris Van Laningham and Joyce White*

## Help! The toys are taking over!

*By Michelle Zimmer, Programs Director*

It's the dream of many parents to walk out the door with their children without any major ordeals, tantrums or negotiating on which shoes or coat to wear. So, when we are finally on our way out the door and our children give that last plea begging us to let them bring their favorite toy or two or three to school, we give in. What can it harm?

As we have an increasing number of children that come to us with their hands and pockets filled with that one all time favorite toy, it becomes necessary to address this with families and those that help drop children off.

### Distraction Inside and Outside the Classroom

When toys come to school, sometimes they are emptied into cubbies, and to most of you that may seem like the end of the problem. However, even in the cubbies, the toys become a distraction. Some children ask teachers over and over again if they can go get their toy and use it in the classroom or when they pass by the toy in the hallway, they want to look at it or take it out and show it to their friends.

Teachers are spending more and more time dealing with children and their toys, and they are missing valuable time interacting and teaching the children. Also, children are missing time spent exploring and learning from the enriching materials provided for them at school.

### Working Together as a Team

Back to the morning scenario ... I am trying to get out the door and my child says that they want to take their favorite ball (if any of you know my child, you will know this is a true story). I have learned as a parent that it is so much easier if the "no toys rule" isn't mine, and I can just say, "I'm sorry, there are no toys allowed at school. It's a matter of fact and there is no need to argue because it's not my rule!"

We've noticed that it is not only necessary to be consistent between home and school, but also between teachers as well. So the "no toys rule" at school helps you get out your door in a quicker fashion and it also helps our teachers say the same thing to children. And if toys do happen to make it through our door, you'll understand when we send them right back home with you.

Nature Explore™ Classrooms are part of a national initiative involving the partnership of Dimensions and the Arbor Day Foundation.

Newsletters and Program information can be found on-line ...  
[www.dimensionsfoundation.org](http://www.dimensionsfoundation.org) or [www.firstplymouth.org](http://www.firstplymouth.org)