

Complimentary

# S. IREDELL *Living*

March 2014

Living the Good Life



STATESVILLE  
**MONTESORI SCHOOL:**  
*A Special Place for Learning*

STATESVILLE  
**MONTESSORI  
SCHOOL:**

## A Special Place for Learning

Article by Kristie Darling  
Photos by Shane Greene Photography

*Photos:*

On the cover—Stacey Crosswhite, Statesville Montessori School director

Pictured—Miss Stacey and her kids! Kinley Feimster, Jake Gusler, Zachary Braunstein, Carrie Rader, Lauralee Wodecki, Jon Schlesinger, Spencer Hansen, Anjallie Hatharasinghe, and Beckham Tharpe

"We've been a part of the Statesville Montessori School family through our four children, the youngest now a sixth grader," Sriyani Hatharasinghe told me enthusiastically. "When I dropped my kids off there, I never worried. They all have really good study habits that they learned at SMS—I never had to tell them to do their homework!" Sriyani now has two boys in college, the oldest graduating in May from NC State with plans for medical school and one studying at UNC-Greensboro. Her daughter is a ninth grader at Iredell-Statesville Schools' IB Program. She is very proud of all her children and very pleased with the education they received at SMS. Sriyani is PTO co-chair with Susan Tharpe, and together they work with teachers and other parents to continually enrich everything that happens at Statesville Montessori School. Recently I visited with the school's director, Stacey Crosswhite, and it was exciting to see all the activity, learning, and fun going on!

### A LEGACY IN EDUCATION

In the early 1970s, Judy Sutton was a mom who saw, through her son, Chris, a need for a different way for children to learn. She began tutoring Chris and several children from public school who needed some extra help. More children came for tutoring, and she knew that there must be a better way to teach. After much research and reading, she felt that the Montessori method of teaching would be that better way.

In 1973, Miss Judy, as everyone called her, received her first Montessori credential and began a preschool in a converted pigeon house in her backyard. The children came, just a few at first, but then more and more. A house located behind the pigeon house on Hartness Road was purchased, and in 1979 Statesville Montessori School officially opened. That building still houses the school's two-and-a-half to five-year-old children.

Miss Judy bought Brookwood School in 1989. Nestled in a peaceful, residential neighborhood on Harmony Drive, the old school was transformed into the elementary school campus of Statesville Montessori. Joined by a handful of teachers who shared her vision, Miss Judy received her second Montessori credential in lower elementary education. The school grew to include upper elementary school, as well. More teachers came, and Miss Judy sent them for more Montessori training.

Miss Judy's passion for providing a safe and caring learning environment became her fulltime work. She oversaw every aspect of running this special place for children. By 1994, Miss Judy had more to do than one person could, so Stacey, her daughter, arrived to become Miss Judy's assistant.

In 1996, Stacey received her first Montessori credential and was ready to continue Miss Judy's legacy. "I inherited this school but most importantly, I inherited Mom's passion. For Mom, it was all about the joy of learning."



Photo provided by Statesville Montessori School



### Photos, top to bottom:

- Beginning math skills are taught using a variety of manipulatives. Beth Bush, teacher, instructs 2nd graders in the use of the multiplication checkerboard.
- The Statesville Montessori Children's House, located at 111 Hartness Road, serves 2 ½-5 year olds.
- Becky Boggs' 4th and 5th graders read aloud from a play about Rosa Parks.



Miss Judy passed away in 1998. She did not see her grandchildren thrive in the school that held her heart and soul. Her granddaughter, Carah, went to Hollywood to sing on American Idol and is currently studying at UNC Chapel Hill. Her sixteen-year-old grandson, Jackson, is a student at Statesville High School. He wants to play football at the Citadel.

Miss Judy's legacy lives on.

#### WHAT IS MONTESSORI?

Italian physician and educator Maria Montessori developed a unique and effective teaching method in the late 1800s and opened her first classroom in 1907. The Montessori approach creates an enriched environment for children in all areas of learning so that students naturally learn inner discipline, self-motivation, and develop a healthy sense of self, all the while advancing academically. "We have a very individualized learning program. For instance, if a four-year-old is reading at a second grade level, we make sure she's getting second grade level reading material. But, if she needs to work on standing in a single file line without touching the person in front of her, we work on that, too. I'm interested in the whole person," Stacey shared. "Our academic program is very challenging and focused to better meet each child's needs. We also emphasize the importance of respect and, of course, make learning fun." Indeed, each class I visited was engaged in something interesting and fun...even math!



#### EDUCATION FOR A LIFETIME

Children can enroll at any age from two-and-a-half to eighth grade. The Children's House has pre-school and pre-kindergarten students while the kindergarten classes have four, five, and six-year-olds. "Our children have fun learning; they feel comfortable and safe here," Elaine Easterling explained. "We place children developmentally and academically. They learn concretely through Montessori manipulatives, hands-on activities, and multi-sensory materials." Elaine is a curriculum advisor assisting Stacey in all the athletic programs and plans for other areas of operations. Stacey explained, "My mom had me, and I have Elaine!"



#### Photos, top to bottom:

- Middle school science teacher Steve Cotton explains rules of aerodynamics and speed to 7th graders.
- Kindergarten teacher Annette Parker gives a one-on-one addition lesson to a student.
- Beth Moore teaches 5th grade students how to subtract fractions using Montessori math manipulatives.

Elementary and middle school students continue their learning through a challenging curriculum and a full spectrum of enriching extra-curricular activities—music, art, and drama, where each grade gives a performance and everyone gets to shine, Spanish beginning with the youngest students, computer familiarity leading to yearbook design in the middle grades, physical education and health for all, balanced with a strong commitment to community service.

"We have PE at least three days a week and non-competitive sports activities start in second grade," Elaine explained. "We have intramural sports for kindergarteners, and competitive sports for upper elementary and middle schoolers include volleyball, tennis, cross country, soccer, cheerleading, golf, and basketball." Statesville Montessori School participates in an independent and charter schools' athletic conference. Their team, the Masters, plays regional schools like Davidson Day School, Community School of Davidson, North Hill Christian School, Lake Norman Christian, and St. Stephens in Hickory. Athletic Director Nell Shull started at SMS in 1989 after a long-established career in sports education. She continues to promote the school's value of strong bodies building strong minds.

In all grade levels, the learning environment features small classes (typically 18 students to one teacher and one teacher assistant), an exciting and challenging curriculum designed for each student's level of development, a peaceful setting, dedicated teachers, and diverse extra-curricular activities.

#### **DEDICATED, EXCEPTIONAL TEAM**

Stacey's 25 teachers and teacher assistants are devoted to their 150 students. "Our job is to create independent thinkers. We set our expectations high, and they do it!" Stacey said with a smile. "Our teachers are the best. Several have been here since Mom hired them many years ago, and others came and have stayed. I think that says a lot about our school. It really is a big family." Stacey introduced me to a kindergarten class as the children were busily getting ready for lunch. They were putting away their materials, each one bent on his mission to clean up and get to eat. I felt a tight hug around my knees, and looked down to see a charming blond boy who said, "Welcome to our classroom." I felt truly welcomed.

#### **PLAN A VISIT TO LEARN MORE**

Statesville Montessori School might just be the best-kept secret in town. If you are not familiar with Montessori schools, and even if you are, a personal visit and tour with Stacey will answer any questions you have. The entire campus is designed with young people in mind—with continually engaging creativity, imagination, joy of learning, and love of discovery. You will see and feel the buzz. Think about how your children or grandchildren might benefit from enrolling at Statesville Montessori School.

**Statesville Montessori School**  
1012 Harmony Drive • Statesville, NC 28677  
704.873.1092 • [statesvillemontessori.com](http://statesvillemontessori.com)



#### *Photos, top to bottom:*

- Teacher Teri Green and assistant Mandy Hutchins work with students.
- Assistant Jacqui Ford helps pre-kindergarten children learn about computers in the recently updated lab.
- Statesville Montessori's Middle School has only 8–15 students per class.