Last Sunday, Kathy and I watched our son Karl graduate from the University of the South in Sewanee, Tennessee. It was a beautiful ceremony with robed processions and hymns and prayers in the university chapel. When Karl’s name was called and he walked across the front of the chapel I felt for his accomplishment an electric tingle of pride that reached all the way to the tips of my toes— and at the same time, a dull lump in my chest signaling the loss I was feeling. Karl’s older brother, Jacob, graduated two years ago and now our youngest was graduating. It marked a passage in our own lives as well as his. It is

continued on page 2
always a challenge as a parent to sort our responses from our children’s responses, or to sort our needs from our children’s needs.

For all of us parents and teachers, whether there is a formal graduation or not, the end of another school year is a bittersweet moment. We have our own reaction to the passage of time—generally a mournful one in a culture that celebrates youth and does not revere its elders—and so there is the temptation to keep ourselves young by denying the growth and change in our children. At the same time, we celebrate that growth and change. It is one of the fascinating and exhilarating dimensions of parenting. The developing gifts and interests of my own children—and of your children—continually amaze me.

I attended this morning a little play written and performed by Middle School students for the Elementary classes. The play was about the life of a human cell. The characters were Golgi bodies and endoplasmic reticula and messenger RNA and so on. It was funny and informative. I expect those students will better understand and remember the organelles in a human cell than I do. What a wonderful culminating event to that particular study.

Shortly after that, we had a fire drill and it went very well. We cleared out of the building in two minutes. As I passed through one of the Primary classrooms on my way to the playground, I had to navigate around eight rugs filled with moveable alphabet stories. The five- and six-year-old children in that class are writing their way to the end of the year—and toward the Elementary—in an explosion of literacy.

Yesterday I received a copy of a poetry anthology from one of the Lower Elementary classes. Inspired by their work last fall with poet-in-residence Jenny Browne, the children and their teacher have continued to write and write and write. As one nine-year-old penned, in the spirit of Walt Whitman embracing all of creation, in the spirit of Montessori’s Cosmic Education, “Poetry is like fish in the sea/Poetry is fun/Poetry is you and me/Poetry is exciting/Poetry is a class doing work/Poetry is peaches/Poetry is love/Poetry is everything.”

And, yes, there is graduation here at Post Oak. Tomorrow, May 28, 2010, at 6:30 pm, a group of nine gifted eighth graders will graduate and, unlike the Sewanee ceremony where only the valedictorian spoke, each student will speak about what they’ve accomplished and what their goals are for the future. Every year we have parents of younger children attend. Why would they choose to do so? It is a peek at the future, allowing them to envision where their own children might be at the conclusion of the Montessori leg of their journey and to reaffirm that this approach to education has the power to shape the whole person. We tell you it is not just what students know that counts, but who they become. Individually and collectively, they speak eloquently of the results. You are invited.

Why attend the graduation ceremony if your child is not graduating?

Parents of younger children who have attended in years past have told us what an unexpectedly powerful experience it was; one that gave them a living “Portrait of a Graduate.” Here’s the answer to the question, “Does Montessori education work?”

Come to graduation May 28, 2010, at 6:30 pm in the gym.
Where are they headed?
Post Oak alumni high school & college acceptances

2010 grads—high schools accepted to:
- Awty International School
- Cypress Woods High School
- Emery/Weiner School
- Episcopal High School
- John Cooper School
- School of the Woods (Woods High School)
- St. Agnes Academy
- St. Thomas High School

2010 grads—high schools attending
- Episcopal High School
- School of the Woods (Woods High School)
- John Cooper School
- St. Agnes Academy

2006 graduates accepted to the following colleges:
- Austin College
- Baylor University
- Boston College
- Clark University
- Clemson University
- Georgetown University
- George Washington University
- Louisiana State University
- Loyola University New Orleans - music school
- Mercer University
- Providence College
- Sam Houston State University - music school
- San Francisco Conservatory of Music
- Santa Clara University
- Sewanee: The University of the South
- Southern Methodist University
- Southwestern University
- Texas A&M University
- Texas A&M University (business honors)
- Texas State University
- Trinity University
- The University of Alabama
- The University of Arizona
- University of Colorado
- The University of Georgia
- University of Houston
- University of Michigan
- University of Notre Dame
- University of Notre Dame (honors program)
- The University of Texas at Austin
- Vanderbilt University
- Villanova University
- Wakeforest University
- Washington University in St. Louis

2006 graduates will attend the following colleges in 2010:
- Baylor University
- Clemson University
- Georgetown University
- Louisiana State University
- San Francisco Conservatory of Music
- Texas A&M University
- Texas A&M University (business honors)
- Trinity University
- University of Houston
- University of Michigan
- University of Notre Dame (honors program)
- The University of Texas at Austin

Congratulations
to our Post Oak alumni!
Spotlight on Alumni
Stephanie Styles, '06

by Shannon Neufeld,
Communications Coordinator

She performed in Scrooge at Theatre Under The Stars in grade one. Science Quest on PBS in grade four. The Sound of Music national tour in grade six. Opera in New York in grade eight. Winner of the English-Speaking Union Shakespeare Competition in the Houston area. Tommy Tune award for best actress in the high school musical (The Drowsy Chaperone) that won the award for best musical. Accepted to the prestigious musical theatre program at University of Michigan. Add to that list roles in Thirteen, My Son Pinocchio, Evita, and Aladdin, etc., and numerous gala appearances.

Not bad for someone graduating from high school on Sunday.

Stephanie Styles (sister of graduating Post Oak eighth-grader) attended Post Oak from age 14 months through grade eight, graduating in 2006. She attended Episcopal High School and graduates on May 30. She has accomplished a lot outside of school, but some of her fondest memories are here at Post Oak.

“I loved this place so much,” Stephanie says. Some of her favorite times were with Mirani Smith, former Primary teacher and now Lower School director. “I swear I see sandpaper letters in my head when I write. Everyone always comments on my cursive—I always do cursive—it’s the natural motion of the hand.” She also loves and respects butterflies because of Mirani. “In fourth grade, I did a TV show with PBS called Science Quest, filmed at the Houston Museum of Natural Science,” she remembers. “There was an episode on butterflies and moths and they picked me because I love butterflies. I know all about them. I was ‘Mother Stewart’ in a sketch.”

In Lower El, she remembers the classroom plays they put on. “The first show I ever did here was Phantom of the Undersea Opera. I was ‘Christine’ the mermaid. In fifth grade, she constructed a rainforest out of broccoli for the science fair. And she liked dressing up as Eva Perón for ‘Famous Person Day.’

“The only art skills I have come from Luiza [Grandchamp],” Stephanie says. She wasn’t able to finish her eighth grade year on campus since she was doing an opera in New York, so she never completed painting her mask—something all graduating students do. “I still have it in my house and I have a sketch of what I want to do. So this summer I’m going to

continued on page 5
"Alumni Spotlight" by Shannon Neufeld, continued from page 4

paint my mask,” says Stephanie. In fact, her brother just finished his. He will be attending Episcopal High School next year as she goes to college.

Because Stephanie sometimes traveled for performances during the school year, she benefited greatly from Montessori. “I’ve been the biggest advocate of Montessori,” she said. “Especially in the theatre world ... on the road, in New York, and even in high school, I had to work on my own and be an independent learner. My education [at Post Oak] has definitely enabled me to do what I love and do it with more ease.”

Stephanie said she feels that Post Oak feeds the “creative aspects of life.” Once someone told her they admired her “scholastic enthusiasm.” She said she will never forget it, “because I do love to learn, and I think that’s what Montessori gave me. Once I got to high school, a lot of my friends seemed so burnt out from learning things they didn’t want to learn [at other schools] and learning in ways that weren’t the best for them. When I got to high school, I loved homework. Freshman year, I was so excited to do my pre-labs and my post-labs because I thought it was the coolest thing ever, because I loved learning.”

She says her transition to high school was smooth. “I feel like I’ve had to be mature because of theatre and working with older people and material, so I wasn’t scared to be with a lot of people,” says Stephanie. “Montessori teaches you to be so open and accepting that it was great and an easy transition.”

In addition to her acting outside of school, Stephanie is also on the high school newspaper staff. “I’m into creative writing, too,” she says. “I think I might minor in that in college if I can, but I haven’t looked into the logistics of that yet.”

Her love for creative writing began at Post Oak, and she is nostalgic for the paper used in Post Oak classes that allows for writing and illustration. “I wish we still had that because I would draw pictures on all my book reports.”

Stephanie first realized her passion for theatre when she was four years old. Her parents took her to see Phantom of the Opera at Jones Hall, and she loved it so much she asked them to take her again the next night. She ended up having a backstage tour with the lead actor, to whom she had sent a message attached to a then-popular Beanie Baby stuffed animal. “That night, I said, ‘Mom, sign me up for theatre classes. I want to do this.”

Stephanie knew she wanted to go to University of Michigan for their musical theatre department, “but I never in a thousand years thought I would get in,” she said. “It was a Harvard—it was a reach.” She said about 2,000 girls are accepted just to audition each year, and they only consider students with 4.0 GPAs for that opportunity. Students auditioning have to prepare to sing two 16-bar songs, perform a dance combination, perform one of two prepared monologues, perform a piano test, and write five essays. “It’s an intense process,” she says. “Usually you hope to get deferred, but I auditioned in November and found out I was accepted in December. I couldn’t believe it ... Michigan is a dream.”

Even in moving forward, she will always look back fondly at Post Oak. “I loved everything about this whole school. It was really great, and it really prepared me for anything I’ve done in life.”
Letter from the Lower School director

by Mimi Smith, Lower School Director

Another year has come to an end...

Another year of accomplishment, fulfillment and success...

So, how does one evaluate success in a Montessori school?

Grades? Test scores? We all know that for us success is rather more fundamental and intrinsic.

The sparkle in the children’s eyes as I open their car doors at arrivals; the hesitant child leaving his parent, and an older child saying, “come, I will hold your hand and walk you to your class, it is going to be okay;” their spontaneous comments about their day at dismissal, “Today was my best day ever!” Success is the quiet affirmation when over 35 children are being placed to move up to Lower Elementary.

In spite of us, a child learns to read and write, has been my mantra to teachers and parents. The uniqueness of what happens at The Post Oak School is because of all we have offered before they learn these skills; children arrive at reading, they discover this skill and take ownership of their own success. When a child who is an emergent reader practices a story over and over again because he wants to read to his classmates, that then to us is success.

Establishing positive relationships … listening to parents sharing how they relate with their children at the monthly F.I.S.H. meetings. Yes, this year was a success when I see how many families helped pioneer the F.I.S.H. group, (Families Integrating School & Home). The success of the F.I.S.H. group came about because one parent wanted to make a difference in her child’s life and wanted the same for others in the community. The success of the F.I.S.H. group was accomplished because all the faculty members in Lower School went above and beyond their call of duty by presenting several topics to the parents, giving freely of their enthusiasm and experience.

Observing teachers striving to create milestone moments for their children, as they continue their quest to refine their work and ask themselves, “What can we do better?” That is success too. Teachers and assistants who together have successfully overcome some very unique challenges children have faced this year.

The success in our admissions process … the personalized tour and time invested in meeting with the prospective parents. Success is also the zeal and effort we put into the prospective parent classes where we try to give parents the opportunity to make an educated decision so that the right families are matched with our school.

The administration team exemplifies cohesion and consequently success when everyone contributes with the gifts of time and energy to support and assist in every way, from making a pot of coffee to planning and executing the logistics needed to choreograph an opera.

I am grateful to the Post Oak families’ cooperation and support in working together to make this school year such a resounding success not only for us, but also the children we serve.

Congratulations, and have a great summer!

Middle School Book Corner

The Red Badge of Courage, by Stephen Crane, is a novel that takes place during the time of the Civil War. This novel is about a young boy, Henry Fleming, and his life in the 304th regiment of the union army. During his time in the army, the novel tells of how Henry goes from cowardly to courageous and earns his red badge of courage.
Best wishes on your retirement, Darwin!

After 21 years as building engineer we celebrated Darwin Matusek’s retirement from Post Oak.
In the Upper Elementary, a history fair alternates with a science fair each year. This year, we ran a history fair. As part of the history curriculum, the fourth grade children study Texas history, the fifth graders study American history, and the sixth graders study world history. But the students are curious about the histories of other topics too, be it sports, games, food, or fashion. The history fair gives them an opportunity to explore other dimensions of history which they choose to learn more about. It also provides them with a vehicle to express and share that curiosity with others, and in the process learn how to do research, acknowledge and cite sources of data, gain layout skills, presentation skills including public speaking, field questions from other students during presentations, and through the experience they expand their knowledge, and learn lessons for life. The children come away from the fair empowered and more confident about themselves and their abilities. The benefits are priceless. —Errol Pinto, Upper Elementary Teacher

Photos by Shannon Neufeld

This year, Middle Schoolers participated in the fair and presented archeological research on the different levels of Montessori school. See the photos marked A & B.
Competitive?

by Mark Tucker, Athletic Director

Are we? I’m often asked by students and parents whether we are competitive here at Post Oak. At our first annual Bearkats Spring Signing Day, we talked with students about our philosophy and also about our history of athletics at Post Oak. We had a great turnout for pizza and conversation, and 28 students made commitments to be a part of the Bearkats in 2010-2011 (and another 28 upper elementary students signed up for intramurals) in sports such as cross country, volleyball, soccer and basketball.

Andrea Dilger and I both have played sports and coached for most of our lives. Andrea played softball in college and then professionally in Germany; I played baseball in junior college and semi-pro for seven years, and have coached here at Post Oak for over sixteen years. I also coach an 18U Gold softball team that plays nationwide and has players from all over our area. Did we ourselves play competitively? Yes.

We teach our students here at Post Oak the skills they will need to continue to play and enjoy sports throughout their lives, and we also teach them to compete hard at practice and in the games. Is winning the most important thing to us as coaches? No. We expect our players to honor the game; play by the rules; show great sportsmanship; and show respect for themselves, their teammates, the officials, the other team and its coaches. It is imperative for them to play fair, play to win, accept losses with class and be a positive example for all those who see them compete. If they cannot do these things, then they will not be a part of the Bearkats.

I mentioned above that I coach a girl’s softball team, and I’d like to comment about that. The team is based in Humble and made up of high school girls from as far away as Katy, Dayton, College Station, Crosby, and Northshore. The goal of all these girls is to play for a top team and earn a college scholarship. We travel the country in the fall and summer so that they can be seen by as many college coaches as possible. We are happy to say that all of the seniors on our team have received softball scholarships to continue their education next year.

I talk to many college coaches throughout the year. One of those coaches is Pat Murphy whose University of Alabama team is currently ranked number three in the country. He has been a huge help to me and my coaching staff in explaining what kind of athlete colleges are looking for. Why am I telling you this? I believe the message Coach Murphy and other college coaches have given me applies to our athletes here at Post Oak as well. What are they looking for in a prospective college player? A good student, outstanding character, great teammate, service to her community, and specifically just a good hardworking person. They say when that girl gets on their campus, they do not want to have to worry about her at all; they don’t have the time to be chasing students to class or keeping them eligible to play.

These coaches have asked me during our games to test a player: to take her out during the middle of an inning just to see whether she will react angrily or pull for her teammates with a positive attitude. Sometimes they follow her out to the parking lot after a tough loss to see how she interacts with her parents and coaches. I had a player last fall get a scholarship offer because she was respectful to her parents after a very tough ball game. She deserved it because not only is she a great player but more importantly, an outstanding person.

This is our philosophy at Post Oak as well; we are trying to teach our athletes to be the complete package: athlete, student, and great character.

Competitive enough? I believe so!

The following are two articles on PE, or as we call it at Post Oak, PF:

“P.E. humiliations can be lasting”
The Washington Post
http://voices.washingtonpost.com/answer-sheet/health-1/do-gym-class-humiliations-last.html

“Response to Valerie Strauss WaPo article: ‘P.E. humiliations can be lasting’” from ASCD Edge Blog
1. The American Red Cross of Greater Houston presented this plaque to the Upper El students who organized the bake sale to benefit Haiti earthquake victims. The students decided to mount the plaque between their classrooms.

2. Counting with the five chain.

3. Do they sound the same?

4. Quiet reading time.

5. Helping a visiting friend from Primary.
CALENDAR

For more, visit www.postoakschool.org

MAY 23–29

Last day of school
Early dismissal:
Fri
05/28
IC at 11:00 am
PRI at 11:30 am
EL & MS at 12:00 pm
Graduation
6:30 pm

MAY 30–JUNE 5

Mon
05/31
Memorial Day
School Closed—no childcare

Tue-Thu
06/01-03
Teacher In-Service Days

JUNE 6–12

Mon
06/07
Summer School Begins

Keep track of school events with our online calendar—or download a fresh copy of the school’s printed calendar, all at http://www.postoakschool.org

Barbara Hacker’s green tips of the week

Five quick tips: In the car, brake and accelerate smoothly. You’ll get better gas mileage. • When you fly, try to fly direct. Each take-off and landing burns a lot of fuel. • Unplug all charging devices (laptops, cell phones, etc.) when not in use. • Replace your most-used light bulbs with compact fluorescent or LED bulbs. • Turn off the TV, computer, and other electronics when not in use.

NOTICE BOARD

Birth announcement
We are pleased to announce the arrival of [name] born on the morning of Sunday, May 23, weighs 6 lbs, 14 oz., and 19½ inches long. Tamara and [name] are fine. [name] is happy to be a big sister.

Looking for a few YEARBOOK volunteers!
Parents: would you like to be part of the committee to design and create next year’s Post Oak yearbook?

Contact Christina Cantu at christinacantu@postoakschool.org

Thanks in advance!

Have a great summer!

ABOUT THE WEEKLY POST

The Weekly Post appears on most Fridays of the regular school year. You can receive a printed copy from your oldest child, or a PDF version online.

Submit letters, articles, or photos in electronic form by 5:00 pm on the Tuesday before publication to Communications Coordinator Shannon Neufeld (shannonneufeld@postoakschool.org). If publication is on a Thursday due to school closure on Friday, then the deadline is 5:00 pm on the preceding Monday.

All photos in The Weekly Post are by Shannon Neufeld unless otherwise noted.

The Post Oak School was founded in 1963 and accredited by both the Association Montessori Internationale (AMI) and the Independent Schools Association of the Southwest (ISAS)

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