

## Montessori school coming to Oconomowoc



### Director hopes to change misconceptions

By EMILY BULTMAN  
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**T**oni Schneider hopes to shatter misconceptions about Montessori when she opens a school for children 21 months through kindergarten in Oconomowoc next

month. "Children are given the freedom to choose and to learn, but that doesn't mean I am putting them in a chaotic environment," Schneider said. "It's about discipline and structure." After home schooling three of her four

children, she discovered her true passion in life was teaching. This path has led her to start Oconomowoc Montessori Preschool & Kindergarten, which will offer 12 one-week summer sessions in June, July and August before regular classes begin in fall.

The Montessori method, founded by Italian educator Maria Montessori in the early 1900s, emphasizes an individualized approach in which children learn at their own pace through specially designed learning tools and self-correcting games in multi-age classrooms.

"The Montessori philosophy has been in place for over 100 years," Schneider said. "It has been proven to nurture and educate the whole child and give them a base of empowerment and love of learning that lasts an entire lifetime."

Schneider previously worked as a teacher's assistant at Nature's Classroom Montessori in Mukwonago before completing her certification from the Canadian Montessori Academy. She also holds full membership through the American Montessori Society.

"I used to think you needed words to teach, but I learned that children learn much better by just having them observe," she said. "I believe that we should just guide the child through an array of interesting and innovative ways of learning about the world around them."

For the past two years, Schneider operated Little Lambs Montessori at All Saints Lutheran Church in Wales. The decision to move was based on the ability to serve more families in the Lake County area, including Okauchee, Nashotah, Delafield, Hartland and the town of Ixonia, while being based in Oconomowoc.

"Montessori benefits every child," she said. "This school will be good for the Oconomowoc community."

Tuition ranges from \$210 for two half days to \$525 for five days, but costs are decreased if more than one child in a family is enrolled. The school day will run from 8:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m., and before- and after-school care is available.

"We don't assign work for students; instead, we encourage students to work independently on activities designed to foster learning and an understanding of how abstract concepts are applied concretely," said Molly Luterbach, teacher's assistant. "It is incredible to see 2- and 3-year olds prepare their own snack and wash their own dishes. They take pride in what they do." Oconomowoc Montessori will have a pri-

mary program as well as a new toddler program. Schneider said the Montessori classroom is similar to a living room for children, where they can choose their work from open shelves and work in specific work areas. Along with math, language, science and geography, students are enriched by the practical life activities. This area contains objects familiar to children that help them accomplish daily tasks, such as preparing food, setting tables, polishing a mirror or brushing their teeth. The toddler program also uses practical life materials to build motor skills, language activities to build literacy and math materials to strengthen counting skills.

Critics of the Montessori philosophy argue that it discourages social interaction and makes it difficult for Montessori students to adjust to homework after they transfer to public schools. However, when Bob Brainerd and his wife, Melissa, were looking for a preschool to send their son, Bo, they learned this was not the case.

"We were uneducated about the whole process of Montessori education. To be honest, I didn't even know what the term Montessori meant," Bob Brainerd said. "Bo is our first and only child, and we wanted what was best for him. We heard different things about education through friends and family and thought we would give this a try."

After learning more about the founding principles of Montessori, the Delafield couple enrolled their son at Little Lambs.

"Bo started only going a couple times a week, and now he goes five days a week. You can tell the school is making a big difference," Bob Brainerd said. "Everything from his speech to his manners has improved."

With Bo turning 5 in August, his parents debated whether their son was ready for kindergarten in the fall. The progress he has made this year left no doubt in their minds.

"There is no question that he is ready for this. Bo passed the screening with flying colors," Bob Brainerd said. "He is even ahead of the game in math and reading. I don't know if we would have been this confident had he not gone to a Montessori school."

#### AT A GLANCE

**What:** Oconomowoc Montessori Preschool & Kindergarten  
**Owner:** Toni Schneider  
**Where:** inside Lord of Life Lutheran Church, N60-W35980 Lake Drive, town of Oconomowoc  
**For more information:** visit <http://oconomowocmontessori.org> or call (262) 443-8445



Submitted photo

Above, Zach Baumann, 2, builds a tower of blocks at Little Lambs Montessori in Wales. Top photo, Dave Arthur, 4, works on a geography activity at Little Lambs Montessori in Wales. The school will relocate to Oconomowoc next month and open under the name Oconomowoc Montessori Preschool & Kindergarten, which will offer 12, one-week summer sessions in June, July and August before regular classes begin in fall.

## High school students eager to visit German sister city

By EMILY BULTMAN  
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### Connecting online, in classroom to build relationship

**R**ebecca Gibbs will soon take her first airplane ride when she travels with her classmates to Oconomowoc's sister city.

"I am a little freaked out, but I think more than anything I am just anxious to get there," Gibbs said. "Knowing I will be with my friends, I will be more at ease."

The Oconomowoc High School junior is one of six students heading to Dietzenbach, Germany, next month for the first student exchange trip.

After the sister city agreement was finalized in December, the high school started developing ways for students in both countries to connect.

"I started to think how the high school could use this opportunity to exchange ideas and build a common interest," said Jason Curtis, OHS

social studies teacher. "Based on what we are learning in class here and what the German students are learning in class there, this cultural exchange trip made sense. The students are able to understand both perspectives."

Students will exchange information by e-mail in the final weeks of school and discuss subject matters such as the dividing and reunification of Berlin and the Cold War.

"Sometimes it can be scary to go somewhere and not know anyone," OHS junior Alyssa Reid said. "In this case, we will have a bond with students before we even get there."

Curtis, who will accompany the students on the trip, said that to be eligible to go on this exchange, students had to be nominated by teachers for exhibiting leadership quali-

ties. Participating students are sophomores Jenna Burnette and Andrew Pflanzler, juniors Molly Erdmann and Brittany Griese, Reid and Gibbs.

After arriving in Frankfurt on June 18, the group will travel to Dietzenbach and tour the Heinrich-Mann-Schule School. Other activities during the 10-day stay include visiting the medieval town and cathedral of Mainz, taking a boat ride to Rudesheim, exploring the House of History in Bonn and touring the Wartburg and Heidelberg castles. OHS students are also preparing a presentation for Dietzenbach government officials about education and culture in Oconomowoc.

"I have already experienced history first-hand having gone to Presi-

dent Obama's inaugural," Griese said. "This trip is a chance to further my learning. I understand history when I have the opportunity to see it."

Costs were minimal for students, because they will stay with host families. Several meals and sightseeing activities were sponsored by German businesses.

"Even though most people in Germany speak English, none of us speak German," Pflanzler said. "I am sure it will be interesting. I'm curious about the differences in culture and lifestyle."

The sister city idea was first proposed in 2005. Wisconsin was already partnered with the German state of Hesse, and Waukesha County had connected with the state's Offenbach district. Four Oconomowoc repre-

sentatives, including Oconomowoc Area School District Superintendent Pat Neudecker, made an exploratory visit to Dietzenbach in November 2006, and the German representatives visited Oconomowoc in October 2007. Neudecker returned with OHS Principal Joseph Moylan, teacher Jim O'Leary and city officials in December. The primary goal for the sister city project is to incorporate and promote education, commerce and government with Dietzenbach, which is a city of 30,000 people.

Curtis said teachers and staff are discussing future opportunities for OHS students to travel to Dietzenbach and for German students to travel to Oconomowoc.

"We may be starting out with a small group of students. This is definitely something we will continue to build on in the future," Curtis said. "It is an honor to represent our school and community to travel to our sister city."