

December 2011

Important Dates to Note on Your Calendar:

Monday, November 28	Our school age students join us; no area elementary schools open
Friday, Dec. 2	Book orders due by 5:30 for holiday delivery
Friday, Dec. 2	Treasures for Children gifts due by 5:30
Friday, Dec. 2	South Hills annual staff Christmas party!!
Friday, December 9	Lighting of the Christmas Tree Ship (Brig Niagara) at the Maritime Museum, sponsored by South Hills. Connie will tell the true story of the Christmas Tree Ship. Please read details below.
Thursday, December 15	Our traditional Gingerbread House Creating Day!
Friday, December 16	Please have your child dress for a very messy but fun project!
Tues., Dec. 20	Hanukkah begins at sundown; Happy Hanukkah!
Wedl, Dec. 21	Winter begins!
Thursday and Friday, December 22 and 23	Holiday Parties!

Sunday., Dec. 25	A Most Blessed Christmas!
Monday, Dec. 26	Kwanzaa begins
Monday, Tuesday Dec. 26,27	Closed
Wed, Thurs, Dec. 28 and 29	Open for Full day, Kindergarten, and School Age students. No half day classes in session.
Friday., Dec. 30	Closed
Sunday, January 1, 2012	Happy 2012!
Monday January 2, 2012	Classes resume according to normal schedule
Saturday, January 7, 2012	A Most Blessed Christmas for our Russian Orthodox families!

Nativity Set

The vast majority of the children celebrate Christmas this month, and we have added wooden Nativity sets to be used in our block corners. You will see these beautiful arrangements used as centerpieces on the tables, but the children will also be using them daily in our block corners.

In the foyer, you will notice a very simple Nativity, created in Indonesia. It will remain until after the Russian Orthodox Christmas.

Blue Shoecovers

No one likes wearing the blue shoecovers; we know that and don't require it to punish you! These shoe/boot covers protect our carpeting and tile where your children spend so much of their day. Please cover your shoes/boots upon arriving during inclement weather, and never wear boots beyond the kitchen.

If your child wears shoeboots, they will need to be removed as well, so please bring additional shoes to wear. Sorry—slippers are not permitted as the children must always be prepared to evacuate immediately in the event of an emergency.

Outdoor Play

The children are required to go outdoors morning and afternoon if the temperature is 40 degrees or above, unless it is raining, lightening, thundering, of course. Please be sure your child is dressed accordingly. And as stated in previous newsletters "If your child is too ill to go outdoors, s/he is too ill to be at school." Licensing regulations require that children have outdoor time every morning and afternoon.

If weather is inclement, the children perform their ABL activities indoors, and we have abundant gross motor activities for the children's benefit.

Portfolio Assessment

The Portfolio Viewing Days were a huge success. Thank you to all the parents who came for conferences or to view their child's portfolio. The responses were overwhelmingly positive, with so many remarks of appreciation regarding the enormous amount of work involved in such a thorough documentation of skills. Since so many of our parents are educators, these positive comments are especially meaningful to the staff.

As the year progresses, the development of your child over the course of his/her time with us will become even more pronounced. Tracking your child's growth is so exciting to all of us!

Holiday Parties

Holiday parties will take place on Thursday and Friday, December 22 and 23. A sign up sheet for food and supplies will soon be posted.

As with all our parties, we request that parents do not send any type of treats or gift bags for the children. We cannot distribute them. Countless other schools are making similar decisions. This decision was made after the past few years of controversy regarding the treat bags and food treats for children. The problems are:

- a large number of children with health related issues connected to foods (Celiac disease, food allergies including milk, peanuts, strawberries, food dyes, and diabetes to name a few), many of which are life-threatening. Even art supplies create problems and all of our art materials at the school must be carefully selected.
- parents who feel their children have more candy, treats, trinkets and prefer not to accept additional items
- parents who feel pressured by other parents to support the treat bags when they feel otherwise
- parents who feel they must reciprocate when treat bags are given, which results (as many of you recall) with children receiving nearly a dozen treat bags per party. We tried to organize a communal treat bag several years ago, which was, unfortunately, disastrous.

Thank you for your support of our policies. Our goal for our school celebrations is for the children to focus on special activities, traditions, and time spent with friends, teachers and families.

Final Payments for 2011

If you plan to use your child care payments for tax credit in 2011, your payment must be received **no later than 5:30 on December 29**. **South Hills is not open on December 30 or 31 and no mail is delivered to us those days.**

South Hills will provide you with a year end statement, documenting all payments for the year. Please look for this by January 31, 2012 in your child's take-home folder.

PLEASE REMEMBER! South Hills Child Development Center Inc.'s federal tax id is written at the top of all receipts. It is: 208087978.

Wrapping Paper

We can use any donations of holiday wrapping paper scraps—please save them for us! They make ideal materials for motivating cutting practice!

Salvation Army Donations

Thank you **so much** for the generous donations to the children on our Salvation Army tree! Many children in our area will enjoy a special holiday due to your kind and overwhelming generosity! **South Hills' families are the BEST!!**

Summer and Fall Registration 2012

If you have not already returned your registration survey for the summer and fall of 2012, please do so as soon as possible. We are working diligently to prepare the financial agreements that you will receive on January 2. If you are unsure of what days you will need reserved for the summer and fall, please just fill in all of the possibilities. Your final decision will need to be made by mid-January.

Kindergarten registration takes place in December due to the long waiting list and the early enrollment for other programs. Our follow-up studies regarding our graduating Kindergarten students reveal consistently from the area school districts that South Hills' students excel in elementary schools in the areas of reading, math, social studies, writing and leadership qualities. Two teachers are in the Kindergarten classroom during reading and math for individualized attention; there are no more than 12 children per class and the curriculum focuses on guided reading, guided writing, math, science, social studies, handwriting skills, motor skills, music, art, Spanish, computer and sign language.

This year, we already have more than double the children we can accept on our waiting list. We are hard at work attempting to determine who will receive those spots, with priority on full time year round students who have attended at least two years. Please do not panic yet, however, since changes usually occur prior to the final scheduling.

The Christmas Tree Ship comes to Erie!

Every year for the past 18 years, Connie has read *The Christmas Tree Ship* by Jeanette Winters to the Kindergarten class. This true story takes place on the Great Lakes, and is

an important part of our local heritage! The Erie Maritime Museum is featuring its annual event on **Friday, December 9** called “The Christmas Tree Ship”! Children can attend with their families from **5:30-8:30 at the Maritime Museum** for crafts, cookie decorating, refreshments, and story telling. At 5:45 that evening, Santa will arrive to light the Niagara as it becomes our own Christmas Tree Ship! Children will be able to visit Santa on board!

South Hills has long been a sponsor of this event, and Ms. Connie serves on the organizing committee. She will be reading the story of The Christmas Tree Ship continually throughout the evening in the large multi-purpose room directly inside the museum doors, and REALLY hopes to see all of her South Hills friends there!

Admission is free; new mittens, gloves, hats and scarves to benefit the area’s children in need are requested as a donation.

SNACK PROBLEM!!

Parents, Please clearly label every bag filled with your family’s snack contribution. We receive four snack contributions each day, and there are many times that four snacks are sitting in the kitchen unlabeled, and we are not able to determine whose snack is to be served to which classes, a.m. or p.m.

We would like to suggest that you return your child’s snack notice attached to the bag with your snack, and complete the form accompanying it, which will make your snack very clear for us. Listing all items on the sheet is also helpful, in the event some items have been placed in the refrigerator. Your assistance would be greatly appreciated. We know you spend extra time shopping and organizing these snacks for us; we want to be able to serve all parts of it without confusion. Thank you for the healthy, appealing snacks that you have provided for the students!

What Have Our Teachers Been Doing????

Connie spent time this past month in Orlando, Florida attending the NAEYC annual Convention. This was her first opportunity to attend a NAEYC convention, and it was beyond her expectations! She had great difficulty filtering through 83 pages of potential classes and presenters, and worked diligently on designing her days to ‘make the most’ of her time and the many offerings. Connie finally decided to focus on nature based play and music. She was able to attend many music classes with some very special presenters—87 year old Ella Jenkins (whose music Connie remembers with great fondness from her own childhood, and has always incorporated in our own music classes!), Bob McGrath (of Sesame Street fame), Hap Palmer (a legend!), Greg and Steve (SOUTH HILLS LOVES GREG AND STEVE!!), and The Learning Station (Laurie and Don Monopoli spent a LOT of time with Connie throughout the week—so gracious and talented!). The nature based play workshops were equally inspiring—and there are lots of new ideas that will be integrated into our own nature based playground at some point!

Mary attended the most recent meeting of the Erie Reading Council, and a workshop totled “Picture Books: Words and Pictures for Every Reader” focusing on the resources available at our own Blasco Library.

Mary has also purchased a violin for herself, and is starting violin lessons, a lifelong dream! We look forward to having her perform during music classes soon and continue to be an inspiration!



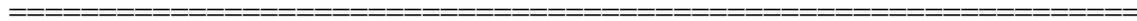
NAEYC Update, from Connie

I believe the long working evenings and weekends are coming to an end for Janice and me. We have been diligently working since February on updating the required binders for accreditation and ‘moving’ information as required by recent changes in the accreditation process. The teachers and remaining staff have all been hard at work as well, documenting each criteria and standard and turning it over to Janice to place correctly in the classroom binders.

The week before Thanksgiving, our *Intent to Renew* was submitted to NAEYC. Now we await a date for our validation visit, which should be sometime in January, but no later than March. If granted reaccreditation, it will be valid until November of 2017.

Thank you for those of you who returned your surveys promptly, and a **special thanks** to all the parents who submitted the most beautiful letters in support of our school, and of me as an administrator. I know how very busy you are, and I am so grateful for the exemplary letters that you wrote—far beyond my expectations! I will keep you updated regarding the status of our accreditation.

You will soon receive an invitation to view the binders that will be presented for our accreditation documentation, and hope you will take a few minutes to stop in the Activity Room and take a look at the fulfillment of the requirements and the hard work of all the South Hills’ staff!



From Connie

December is such a busy and hectic month. Don’t neglect time to care for yourself as a parent! In your attempts to do so much for your children and make the season a perfect one, many of you ignore your own needs. Remember, you will give your best when you are rested, calm, relaxed, and happy.

Looking for a special gift for your child? Look no further than yourself and TIME spent with your child! Holiday memories are not always made of gifts under the tree that are quickly used and forgotten. Think about your own childhood. Do you remember the specific gifts, or the time spent sharing with family and loved ones? It is the simple family traditions that children remember as they grow. Hearing the details of that first Christmas story or Hanukkah event, baking cookies, singing traditional songs together,

walking in the snow at night, hearing stories associated with special decorations or holidays past, or taking a small homemade gift to a neighbor are all the makings of special times spent together. These memories last a lifetime, and are shared for generations to come!

My staff and I wish you the makings of many happy memories this holiday season, and we thank you for the blessings of YOU. You are all truly a part of the South Hills Family, and we enjoy sharing this time of year with your special child. Peace to all. . .

Connie

P.S. HINT HINT! We LOVE receiving Christmas cards with your child's photo on them! They are kept in a special album when the holiday is over! Please add us to your annual Christmas card list and **never** take us off!