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Wyndcroft and the Arts - A Perfect Match

By Tony Rotondo
Photography by Kelly O'Keefe

The Wyndcroft School located in the lovely Rosedale neighborhood of Pottstown provides a vibrant learning community where students in Pre-K to Grade 8 develop personal, academic, and social responsibility leading to a lifetime of discovery.

For over 90 years, the independent, co-educational private day school has changed with the times, but one thing has remained constant – *non sibi* – its overriding commitment to doing something, but not to one's benefit alone, but to sharing with others. It remains today a happy place where students are empowered and encouraged to grow and believe in themselves and their unique abilities. A place where students can take pride in their thinking and their work. "And," says Maureen K. Schmidt, director of admissions, "they can trust that their community is here to support them. Our faculty and staff work collaboratively with parents as partners. Our success," she explains, "stems largely from their support and generosity."





Above: Mrs. Lenzi, first a parent of a Wyndcroft student, now a teacher, is a human dynamo of artistic flair and passion. An accomplished water colorist and graphic designer, Mrs. Lenzi explodes with ideas that bring art not only to her classroom but also to the entire school.

In recent years, schools across the country have been discontinuing music, art, and other creative classes from curriculum, citing tight budgets as the reason for the cutbacks. The schools see these classes as frills, mere diversions from the basics. But at Wyndcroft, the thinking is different. Here it is a firm-held belief that exposure to art is important for children, citing studies that show that other educational skills are enhanced when students experience the arts. Children learn how to view the world in a less linear perspective and can think outside the norm. Wyndcroft feels that art helps children's personal development by bringing their thoughts and feelings into creative forms of expression.

Further, children become more confident in their abilities and feel good about what they do. In art classes and drama productions, social skills are enhanced as students come together and cooperatively reach a common goal – a mural, a collage, even a Broadway musical.

That brings us to two of the many vibrant and innovative teachers at Wyndcroft – Bar-



bara Lenzi and Pam Boddy. Mrs. Lenzi, first a parent of a Wyndcroft student, now a teacher, is a human dynamo of artistic flair and passion. An accomplished water colorist and graphic designer, Mrs. Lenzi explodes with ideas that bring art not only to her classroom but also to the entire school. "Art promotes creativity and balance in life," says Lenzi whose spiked hair goes in as many directions as her popular course offerings. "I introduce as many different mediums as I can. I want my students to experience art from many vantage points, and I want them to be ready for high school where an interest in art fostered here can flourish in their new surroundings."

Students often come back from their prestigious high schools like Devon Prep, The Haverford School, The Hill School, and Malvern Prep with thanks and praise for a solid foundation in the arts. In fact, students speak of influences that live long after their high school days. Says Dr. Kathleen E. Wunner, head of school, "Hardly a week goes by without the appearance of some alumni in the office, a young man or woman of 18, or 20, or sometimes older with tiny children in tow, saying, 'May I introduce my children to Mrs. Lenzi?'"

One such returning student is the GRAMMY® Award-winning Taylor Swift, country-pop singer-songwriter, and actress. In 2008, her albums sold a combined four million copies, making her the best-selling musician of the year in the United States. Taylor never forgot her roots and her love for Wyndcroft, recently donating thousands of dollars for the school's sound and light systems.

From simple Valentine hearts and verdant shamrocks to elaborate mosaics and sarcophagi, the school is rife with students' artwork. The hearts represent a school-wide project of caring and sharing with the dispossessed of hurricane-ravaged Haiti. Hundreds of dollars were raised to help the nation rebuild.

The life-size sarcophagi of mummified bodies of dead Egyptian pharaohs were skillfully made and decorated by the school's 5th graders as part of their social studies lessons on ancient Egypt. They became an integral part of the set for this year's all-school musical *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat*.

That brings us to the second dynamo – Pam Boddy, drama coach and director of the annual spring musical. "I just love creating something wonderful," says she. "The kids just come alive for these productions. I take what's inside and bring it out. They learn of the gifts they didn't even know they had. That's why it's a big mistake to eliminate music in schools. Plus," she adds, "researchers have found



Above: Former Wyndcroft student and GRAMMY® Award-winner Taylor Swift never forgot her roots and her love for Wyndcroft, recently donating thousands of dollars for the school's sound and light systems.

that young children who take music lessons show different brain development and improved memory over the course of a year compared to children who do not receive musical training. To not include music in the curriculum is short-sighted."

"*Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat* is one of the few major British musical theatre shows with hardly any spoken dialogue, it's sung-through almost completely. And," reports Boddy, "what wonderful singers we have discovered here at Wyndcroft." Much of this is attributed to Barbara Kolvek, music teacher and director of the upper school chorus.

"The task of the artist at any time is uncompromisingly simple – to discover what has not yet been done, and to do it." That's what the English poet Craig Raine said. And that's what these creative teachers do. The academic program at Wyndcroft is strong, but so too is its commitment to the arts. During school, after school, even in the summer, art abounds. •

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