On March 3rd I celebrated the completion of my first year as director of the Vivian Olum Child Development Center. I can still remember those first days, how kind everyone was and how overwhelming it was to learn so many new names and faces. I have to admit, I’m still learning to put some of your names and faces together, but I’ve come a long way! It continues to be a joy to be director of this nurturing, learning and growing environment.

Winter term has been a very productive one for all of us. I have observed some of our Dreamers begin to walk and Builders turn into very capable toddlers who can walk in a group and play in the Commons. I’ve gotten handwritten letters from preschoolers who are learning to write, and I have some very good portraits of Lucy, my dog, done by the great artists in our Inventors class. The very reason I wanted to come to the VOCDC is to be with children and their families over an extended period of time and develop meaningful relationships with parents and children. It feeds my soul to observe and celebrate with you their growth and development.

As you look through this newsletter, you will find that our center Advisory Council has been busy doing some great work. Hopefully you have read the survey that was sent out and completed it so we can continue to plan meaningful activities and events. The Council is also gearing up to provide food for our UO student staff during finals week, which is an annual parent-run and sponsored end-of-winter term event. Watch for sign up sheets in your child’s classroom. Finally, thank you again for all who made and bought plates at the end of fall term. The children are now enjoying new puppets and toys in the Commons.

The Peanut Recall Continues On and On

Although I have not sent you the weekly list of items being recalled due to including peanuts contaminated with salmonella, I did send out an email about a month ago to alert everyone and I trust that you are keeping current on the growing list yourself. Several locally available items have been on the list, including ice cream, Cliff Bars sold at Costco, several items with nuts in them from Trader Joe’s as well as lots and lots of trail mix, trail mix bars and such. Some of the items are known to contain nuts with salmonella and some are on the list because manufacturers have voluntarily put them on the list if the nuts were from PCA in Georgia. What I have learned is that peanuts from Texas and New Mexico are fine and any products made with nuts from those sources are safe.
We will celebrate Vivian Olum’s Birthday this year on Thursday, May 14th. As in the past, we will start the day with a parade around the block (Columbia to 17th, to Agate, to 15th, and back to VOCDC through the walkway by the Natural and Cultural History Museum.) As we walk, we will take bouquets of flowers to our neighboring offices and departments. Each year, parents and staff bring in flowers from their gardens to make the bouquets. Afterwards, we will have a light lunch for parents to enjoy with their children. This year, we have a special treat for the early afternoon. Margqux Meganck, a UO art student, will be doing a reading of her book, *Out in the Garden*, and also signing her books if parents want to purchase one. She also will display some of her original art work that was used to make the book. Many of our children are very interested in art and books and we feel this will be an excellent opportunity for all of us to meet an artist, illustrator and an author. We also welcome parents to stay and help us plant flowers and seeds in our gardens in and around our building as well as lend a hand to help spread sand and bark chips to replenish our playground. It is a really fun day and a time to spend some quality time with your child and the friends and staff at VOCDC. I hope you can join us!

**UO Graduate Student Research Project on Home Birth**

- Did you plan to have a home birth with a midwife in Oregon but were transported to a hospital?
- Do you wish to share or retell your transport story?
- Amy, a graduate student at the UO, is conducting interviews discussing these questions. Amy Miller has 3 children of her own, all of which were born at home with midwives.
- The interview will last between 1 and 2 hours and can take place either in your home or in an office: wherever you feel comfortable.
- Please contact Amy if you are interested in participating in her dissertation at: (541)337-1447 or acmiller@uoregon.edu
- Some questions she is exploring includes:
- When the need for a transport occurs, who makes the decision?
- What was your experience of transport like?
- Is there anything you would like to change about your transport experience?

**VOCDC Advisory Council Nutrition Focus Group**

We had our first Nutrition Focus Group meeting on February 5th. We have 3 parents in our group: Amy Singer, Yvonne Bradford, and Michelle Holdway. Kelley Foley (Pathfinders lead teacher) and Carol Snead are the staff members. We may have one of our students join us who is planning to do graduate work in nutrition. We also have a community representative in our group: Her name is Amber Yui. Amber teaches nutrition at Lane Community College and is also a dietician at the Riverbend campus of Sacred Heart Hospital. We have set some goals for our group to work on:

- Look for new suppliers of food that are local and have organic products
- Develop a seasonal menu for snacks to add variety and use in-season food
- Expand acceptance and familiarity with a wider range of culturally specific foods
- We hope to find ways to get parents more involved in sharing and making family favorite foods as well as their family cultural information about foods and samples of them. We also want to find ways to involve our children with local producers of food who are both growing and making foods we eat. We welcome any input from parents. Our next meeting is Tuesday March 17th.
The University of Oregon Institute for a Sustainable Environment is a center for special, collaborative, and applied research projects. The Institute’s activities aim to produce information that can help resolve complex problems and enable people to sustain the economies and environmental systems that support their communities.

VOCDC parents, Heather Brinton and Kathy Lynn, have lead the initiative to have our center evaluated by the Institute in order to increase our awareness of sustainability practices and hopefully initiate some new ways to improve what we have already started doing.

Members from the Climate Leadership Initiative will be visiting VOCDC on April 1st to conduct their very comprehensive audit of our facility and operations relating to sustainability practices. On Friday, April 3rd, they will return and meet with Carol Snead to share their findings and make suggestions on ways that VOCDC can be greener!

The POWER of PLAY... excerpts from Dr. Michael Meyerhoff

Dr. Meyerhoff earned his doctorate in human development from the Harvard Graduate School of Education where he also served as a researcher with the Harvard Preschool Project. He currently is the Executive Director of The Education for Parenthood Information Center. His education, research and philosophy of early childhood education supports what we do at the VOCDC. Dr. Meyerhood notes that for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers, having fun and learning are one and the same. He advises parents to avoid placing young children exclusively in programs with a strong academic orientation; and he urges them never to underestimate the power of play in promoting optimal education development. He states that parents who enroll their children in academically-oriented programs often feel their children are “wasting” precious time and missing out on many learning opportunities during their early years. They also may believe that if their child collects certain academic skills earlier than other children, this will give her a competitive advantage when everyone enters the formal school system. Also, they may be afraid their child will be “left behind” when they see the children of neighbors and friends enrolled in these special programs. Dr. Meyerhoff states that “although parents mean well, they have been badly misguided”. He further explains that you can employ elaborate and time consuming techniques and teach a child most anything: he cites the example of a toddler who has learned to identify pictures of all the presidents. However, there is no evidence to suggest that such programs produce any genuine and enduring advantages. Children can be trained to perform various scholastic activities, but they really have not been “educated” in a meaningful way. While training concentrates on instilling specific pieces of knowledge and shaping specific forms of behavior, education focuses on the development of fundamental concepts and basic capacities. While training can be accomplished rather quickly, education simply cannot be rushed. The child who is fully exposed to the power of play receives a lot of genuine and enduring advantages. First, he has a chance to build strong educational foundations by developing a broad knowledge base and universal skills. Second, he has an opportunity to maximize his potential by creativity. And third, the entire learning process becomes self-sustained because his natural love of learning is preserved and enhanced. Furthermore, the power of play promotes ultimate happiness by providing big benefits in the equally important areas of interpersonal relationships and self-esteem.

If you would like to read Meryerhoff’s entire article on the Power of Play, please email Carol Snead at snead@uoregon.edu or call her at 346-6585.
With the promise of Spring and the upcoming Spring Break, I wanted to share some of my favorite places for children to have hands-on learning experiences in and around Lane County. One of our parents reminded me that many of our families at VOCDC are not from Oregon and perhaps have not experienced all the varied kinds of geography and sights to see. Because of the location of our county, we can drive one hour in almost any direction and see incredibly different environments. I’m sharing with you some of my families’ favorites as we traveled around the state with 3 small children.

Lots of families have been to the coast but have you ever gone to Salem, west towards the coast on highway 22 and then take the cut off to Pacific City? The towns along this stretch of the coast are small and quaint. You can watch people surfing at Pacific City and climb the dunes and watch whales. You can go a little farther north to Bob Straub State Park where there are some great hikes for families. While you are in this area, the Tillamook Cheese Factory on Hwy 101 east of Pacific City is a great stop for children. There is a lot to do as you watch them make cheese, get lots of samples, play games, and have some tasty ice cream. It makes for a great rainy day activity!

One of our family favorites is to go east on highway 126 up the McKenzie River. You can stop and fish safely with children at Leaburg Dam and watch the fish go through the ladder. Traveling east are several easy hikes to waterfalls as well as our favorite place to relax: Belknap Hot Springs. This is a very child-friendly resort, campground and swimming pool with hot mineral water. There are fantastic hikes across a bridge over the McKenzie River and through some very beautiful gardens.

Another nice day trip to the north is to visit the Oregon Gardens, just east of Salem at the Keizer exit. This garden is very child and family-friendly. From there you can go through Silverton to Silver Creek Falls State Park. There are many hiking trails in and around the 3 falls that are particularly beautiful.

In April, I highly recommend a visit to the Tulip Festival just east of Woodburn (off I-5). Many of you have seen the photo in my office of Lucy and me in the tulips. The tulip fields in bloom are a spectacular sight! There are lots of things for children to do there including free rides on the cow train and a playground.

If it is a rainy and cold spring break, a trip to Salem to the A.C. Gilbert’s Discovery Village is fun for children of all ages. It’s a hands-on museum with an Infant and Toddler Room, Bubble Room, and much, much more. Visit their website at acgilbert.org for more information. McMinnville is a town on highway 99W just north and west of Salem. They have a fantastic Aviation and Space Museum that is another fun thing to do on a rainy day.

There are many more great trips for families in and around Lane County and I recommend the following books for more ideas:

**BEST HIKES WITH KIDS: OREGON** by Bonnie Henderson.

**FUN WITH THE FAMILY, OREGON: Hundreds of Ideas for Day Trips with the Kids**, by Cheryl McLean

**100 HIKES/TRAVEL GUIDE OREGON COAST AND COAST RANGE**, by William Sullivan. The table of contents has symbols that indicate the hikes that are child-friendly.

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