RECAP of SOUTHERN TIDINGS ECE ARTICLES in 2015-2018:

Early Childhood Education
Winning Souls through Early Childhood Education

BY ALVA JAMES-JOHNSON

When Sharon Benjamin-Lawrence needed a safe haven for her three-year-old son, she searched all over her south Florida community for the right child care center. She wanted a clean, Christian environment where teachers were warm and friendly. So, she enrolled him at the Maranatha Child Development Center in Miami Gardens.

The Center is affiliated with Maranatha Church. And Benjamin-Lawrence, then a non-Adventist, was so pleased with the results that she eventually enrolled her other three children. From there, she sent them to William A. Kirlew Jr. Academy, the church’s K-8 program. Now, Benjamin-Lawrence and her children are not only satisfied former customers of the Center, but they’re also baptized members of Maranatha Church. Her youngest child is currently a third-grader at the junior academy.

“I was pregnant with my last daughter, Tifannie, and because my kids went to the day care, and then from there to William A. Kirlew Jr. Academy, it was like I was consistently hearing the teachings of the Seventh-day Adventist religion more and more each day,” said Benjamin-Lawrence, a virtual facilitator at Miami-Dade County Public Schools. “The kids would come home singing their songs, praying, and stuff like that. And I was like, ‘You know what? I think it’s time to be baptized, not only for me, but for my kids so they can see this is the life I want to live.’”

Benjamin-Lawrence’s experience is not unique. Early childhood programs across the Southern Union Conference are not only reaping great rewards when it comes to laying the foundation for academic development, but they are giving a boost to elementary schools and evangelism programs, too. At a time when many Seventh-day Adventist congregations are struggling to keep their school doors open and grow church membership, centers like Maranatha Child Development Center could provide a model for future success.

Tamara Lopez Libonati, associate director of early childhood education for the Southern Union, said about 41 percent of kindergarten students at elementary schools in the Union come from early childhood programs affiliated with the denomination. And, many of their families join the Church.

“Our centers provide an avenue for the local church to do additional outreach in the community,” Libonati said. “With each child in the center comes access to parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, and neighbors at a level of familiarity and interest that is not seen nearly as much in elementary and secondary levels.

“Many centers are evangelistic series that operate 52 weeks a year, and some 10 months a year as the center operates on the campus of a school and is only open when school is in session.”

Early childhood programs serve children from birth through four years old, which are crucial years for spiritual development, according to Ellen White. In her book “The Ministry of Healing,” she wrote, “Too much importance cannot be placed upon the early training of children. The lessons learned, the habits formed, during the years of infancy and childhood, have more to do with the formation of the
character and the direction of the life than have all the instruction and training of after years," *The Ministry of Healing* page 380.

Yet, Libonati said some church members have been reluctant to support early childhood education programs because of the traditional Adventist emphasis on parents as their children's first teachers, as recommended in many of White's writings. While that may be ideal, Libonati said, educators in the Adventist church have had to adapt to the changing society — first with more and more children entering school at kindergarten and, now, even earlier.

"Quality child care is an urgent need in today's society," she said. "Parents are working. They are afraid their children are going to be behind if they don't get that early start. There are all kinds of things going on that have changed our society. And that's where we are now with pre-K.

By opening their doors to the community, Libonati said, Adventist early childhood programs are following Jesus' example, providing a mechanism by which parents can bring their children to the Savior beginning at birth.

"In 1904, the church was counseled and strongly encouraged to provide for the training of your children in situations where parents work out of the home and/or find themselves lacking in parental skills," Libonati said. "The Southern Union Conference of Seventh-day Adventists' early childhood program strives to follow that counsel in offering healthy, safe, Christ-centered environments to parents of the church and its community for their young children."

Libonati said her office developed a biblically-based preschool curriculum called *Pebbles: A Faith-based Early Childhood Curriculum* that has been implemented union-wide during the past three years. It was recently voted by the Southern Union Board of Education to be the adopted curriculum for all Southern Union birth through pre-kindergarten programs.

"This curriculum is unique from the thematic unit curriculum that's typical for children because it uses a concept of character growth as the essential focus each month, integrates age-appropriate learning experiences from all developmental domains (spiritual, physical, mental, emotional, and social), addresses nationally recognized teaching and learning standards that are developmentally appropriate for young children, and is aligned with the Seventh-day Adventist kindergarten curriculum to provide seamlessness in the multi-grade pre-K/Kindergarten classrooms in our church schools." The Southern Union Conference currently has 88 early childhood programs, according to 2014 statistics provided by Libonati. Forty-three are stand-alone centers and 42 are school-based pre-kindergarten programs in Seventh-day Adventist elementary schools. Florida Conference has the highest number of programs, with 28. South Atlantic has 15, Georgia-Cumberland has 12, Southeastern has 11, South Central has seven, Carolina has five, Kentucky-Tennessee has four, and Gulf States has three. Of the 322 adult personnel who work in the programs, only 50 of them work in school-based pre-K classrooms. The other 275 work in centers.

The Maranatha Child Development Center is in the Florida Conference. Thedyn Brown, the executive director, said the Center started in 1979 and she arrived in December of 1980. Members of the church, led by then-pastor William A. Kirlew, had noticed a need for child care services within the growing congregation.

"It started out as a need for somewhere for parents to have their children in a Christian environment while they worked," Brown said. "And, it wasn't really based on academics. It was like introducing them to Jesus, and making sure they stayed safe until their parents returned."

But as the years went by, the Center began to also focus on developmental activities for the children, taking into consideration the spiritual, physical, mental, social, and emotional domains. It is now licensed by the state of Florida, which required improving the physical plant and the curriculum over the years. Brown said the Southern Union Conference has also played an integral role in fine-tuning the program, which is currently based on the *Pebbles* curriculum.

She said the program became so successful that the church had to open the William A. Kirlew Junior Academy in 1993. "When the children had to leave here and go on to kindergarten, we had nothing," she said. "And so there was a need. Parents came and asked, 'What is going to happen to my child after they leave the child care center?'

The junior academy started with 16 students, and today it has 176. The child care center has 76 children. Brown said she manages a staff of about 12 people, working both part-time and full-time. "We're a feeder program for our elementary school," she said. "Some of these parents, they are not Seventh-day Adventists. There's a scholarship that is offered. We introduce them to the scholarship, and year after year, so many of these students go on to the elementary school, so much so that when they have Week of Prayer (at the elementary school), not only do some of these students get baptized, but some parents have also joined the church because of our influence."

Brown said evangelism begins the moment parents walk through...
These 23 students have all been baptized through the joint ministry of the Maranatha Child Development Center and the William A. Kirkee Junior Academy in Miami Gardens, Florida, and many of their parents are now strong supporters of Adventist education. Standing with them are Thelma Brown (left, second row), director of the Child Development Center, and Hermine Thompson (left, third row), principal of William A. Kirkee Junior Academy. On the far right are Newton King, senior pastor, and Guibert Ernou, (right, third row), associate pastor.

The door. Parents are asked if their children have already been blessed, and if not, the church offers those services. “Parents are also invited to evangelistic meetings and other church programs. Some are now church leaders. When one child, Shaunte Stewart, was born, her sister was already at the Center,” Brown said. “Her mother asked one of the teachers to be Shaunte’s godmother and the family eventually joined the church. Shaunte, now a young adult, is the church’s Pathfinder leader.”

“The church, the school, and the child care center—we’re a little community and we work together,” she said. “In some child care centers, they have a hard time, but we’ve had very supportive parents and a supportive church board.”

Sharon Brown is director of the Ephesus Christian Childcare Center in West Palm Beach, Florida, which is in the Southeastern Conference. She said the Center has 57 children, ages two to five years old. It is located in a wing of the church, and serves as a feeder for a K-9 junior academy at another location. The academy has 77 children.

“Three years ago, 17 out of 21 children graduated out of the preschool program straight into the academy,” said Browne, who has been the director for 10 years. In total, the academy pulled 42 children from that crop of students due to siblings who also transferred. Browne said 95 percent of the preschool students are not Adventist.

Browne said the evangelism that transpires has a rippling effect. “God uses us as conduits so we can spread His Word through the children,” she said. “And in doing so, those children spread the Word to their parents. I have seen parents’ lives changed. I have seen broken families healed. I would not trade where I am for anything, because God has allowed us to speak into the lives of children.”

“The beauty of it is that it’s in an unobtrusive manner,” she added. “When a child approaches you with the love of God, it’s in its purest form. There are no hidden agendas. It is just purely to share the love of God. And, parents respond because of what the Bible says: ‘It’s coming out of the mouths of babes.’”

Randy Dawson, and his wife, Vicki, have two children in the Ephesus child care program—one four-year-old Randianna and two-year-old Raina. Dawson was raised Adventist, but had strayed from the faith. He decided to be rebaptized about two years ago after his oldest daughter began attending the child care center. His wife, Vicki, is now considering joining the church, and the children’s grandmother is also attending regularly.

At Greater Miami Adventist Academy (GMAA), the early childhood director, Jocelle Taylor, is having a similar experience. The program, located in the Florida Conference, began in 2006 with a small pre-K program. Two years later, leaders recognized a significant need for a full-blown early childhood center. The program now has 32 children, and each year about 75 percent of those who leave pre-K
for kindergarten continue at GMAA. Last year, only two out of 13 did not return, Taylor said.

"It has been a huge blessing for me personally, as well as the school," she said. "We are a feeder for the school. We’ve seen children go through the early childhood program and continue on throughout the elementary years."

Taylor said both Adventist and non-Adventist parents have expressed appreciation for the quality education their children receive. She began taking a survey a couple years ago to find out why parents chose the Center. She discovered that many had left other facilities because they were looking for a Christian environment, regardless of their religious background. They also wanted strong academics.

"We are not a day care," she said. "We are an early childhood program, and we say that with confidence and with pride. Obviously, our goal is always to have that teacher, family, church connection. And, because we deal a lot with the neighboring cities, we have a lot of people who are non-Adventists or Christians, period. They are just from the neighborhood, see our school, and want to put their children there."

Ivo Alonso, M.D., and his wife, Angelica, who live in the neighborhood, are not Adventists. They were looking for a quality child care center for their son, Ivo Jr., when he turned four years old. Alonso said they learned about the Center at GMAA from another parent who had a positive experience. So they began looking into the program.

"We did research on the Internet, not only about moral and religious issues, but academics," he said. "We read a lot of the reviews and saw that other parents gave it an A rating. So we decided to give it a try."

Alonso said his son, now in his second year at the Center, has made significant progress in the program. "He used to be shy, but the teachers worked with him," he said. "We are happy with the change and his ability to talk to people, not only his age, but adults. He has developed a lot of self-confidence."

Alonso said he and his wife are Christians who don’t belong to any particular denomination. The family recently worshiped at an Adventist church, and they want to learn more about the faith. His wife is also pregnant with another child who they plan to enroll at the GMAA child care center one day.

"The child care program is excellent," he said, "and that’s what I want for my children."

Also James Johnson is a reporter and columnist at the Ledger-Enquirer in Columbus, Georgia.

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**Invitation to Pray for Early Childhood Education**

Each month the cover feature focuses on a different ministry of the Church. Prayer is the breath of life that mobilizes ministry. Therefore, we invite you to pray for the ministries of the Church. This month we invite you to pray for the Lord Almighty for the Early Childhood Education (ECE) Ministry in the Southern Union.

- Pray for the work of education and redemption occurring in our centers.
- Pray for those who minister in the ECE centers. Ask God to empower them with His Spirit, meet every need, and use them for the salvation of every child and parent.
- Pray for the children and their families.
- Pray that God will provide the financial and material needs of each center.
- Pray that when Jesus comes, they will hear Him say, "Well done and welcome home, children!"

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Thelvyn Brown, director of Manassas Child Development Center, is proud of sisters Monique and Antonique McKenzie, who began attending Manassas as infants. Through the ministry of the Center, they and their stepfather and mother, Eric and Sophia (McKenzie) Allen, have been baptized. Now Monique and Antonique are in college, but serve the Center as teachers, and their mother is food coordinator for the Center. Pictured are Monique McKenzie (left), Sophia McKenzie Allen, Thelvyn Brown, and Antonique McKenzie.
Ephesus Academy CDC Starts Off on the Right Foot

Ephesus Academy Child Development Center (CDC) is located at 829 McMillon Avenue in historic Birmingham, Ala. The Child Development Center began operating in 1990 out of

ultimately, preparing souls for Heaven. The motto is “Excellence from the Start.” The center is fully licensed by the State of Alabama, and serves children between the ages of six to share the love of Jesus, and a passion for learning. By combining Christian principles and a faith-based curriculum, the Center meets individual needs by providing an outstanding pre-school child, according to his own potential, in 10 essential areas: 1. spiritual development, 2. physical development, 3. social development, 4. cognitive development, 5. psychological development, 6. emotional development, 7. development of motor skills, 8. development of self-help skills, 9. development of creativity, and 10. development of family ties.

Since 1990, approximately 2,000 students have been entrusted to the Center’s care. Ephesus Academy Child Development Center has become an integral part of the Ephesus Academy K-8 program, with many of the pre-K children continuing their education in the elementary and middle school. Many graduates from the facility, who are now adults, enroll their children so they can share the same experience.

It is the Center’s plan to continue God’s Work until He comes. “And all thy children shall be taught of the Lord and great shall be the peace of thy children,” Isaiah 54:13.

—BY DAPHNE HENDERSON

a need to provide quality Adventist education at a pre-school level.

Under the leadership of Daphne Henderson, CDC director, the goals are the following: laying the proper foundation at an early age so that the children will have a lasting relationship with Jesus; preparing them for the present world; and, weeks and five years old. The child-friendly facility spans approximately 4,500 square feet. Staff members are certified professionals who are devoted to providing excellence in education, and are committed to upholding the high standards and ideals of an Adventist Christian education. The daily goal is nurturing environment. Based on the Seventh-day Adventist philosophy, the teachings and activities are designed to provide a practical and hands-on experience for each child.

The school has defined the objective of its child development program to promote the healthy growth and development of each

Teachers dedicated to early learning include Valencia Galley (left), Voncile McGee, Fredericka Scott, Alicia Hill, Tad Kimberhough, Daphne Henderson (right, black jacket), Anetsa Davis, Kimberly Brown (front row, seated), and Cynthia Johnson.
MCE Holds Pre-Kindergarten Program

MCE student Ciara Collins is the chef in the kitchen.

It was nearly Valentine's Day and the pre-kindergarten students were making cards for people they care about. One student said, “Who’s going to make a card for Jesus?” Several students chimed in with, “I will, I will,” until someone posed a problem. “How are we going to get the card to Jesus when He lives in Heaven?” Silence, you could practically see the wheels spinning in their heads. What were they going to do? Finally a boy’s eyes lit up and he proclaimed, “It’s okay, Jesus will still like the card even if He is in Heaven!”

Pre-K teachers are regularly asked by the problem solving and thought processes of their students. Inspiring and encouraging creativity, critical thinking, and a love for Jesus are a few of the many things a Pre-K teacher does.

Pre-K is a new program at Madison Campus Elementary (MCE), and is a groundbreaker for the community in this area. MCE offers the option for students to be full-time to meet the needs of working parents, or part-time to enrich the education of children with a stay-at-home parent.

Parents are their child’s first and most important teacher. There are many things that can be done at home to build a strong foundation. Providing a rich atmosphere with lots of educational activities, and letting the child learn at their own pace are very important.

Early childhood education is about building learning foundations. The challenge for early childhood educators is to engage the brains of young children for learning success, and empower families to do the same. When the value and importance of this is recognized by parents and educators, children will be best prepared to further God’s purpose.

—BY RACHELLE WETMORE, MCE PRE-K TEACHER

The Learning Tree Academy Serves Community

The Learning Tree Academy, an outreach ministry of Apopka, Fla., Church, offers the community a complete preschool curriculum for children ages two months to five years. On May 30, 2015, the school held its annual baccalaureate program.

Most of the 30 graduates’ parents are not Adventist Church members. These parents have entrusted their children to the caring staff who show their dedication to students by offering an interactive program inspired by God’s love for each young person. The morning message with testimonials from parents encouraged the young people to never quit.

The staff believe children need the healthy development of emotional, spiritual, physical, and cognitive skills according to biblical principles. The philosophy of The Learning Tree Academy follows Proverbs 22:6: “Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it.”

—BY ROBERT BROOME

Energetic graduates of The Learning Tree Academy in Apopka, Fla., perform at their baccalaureate program.
Evangelism in the Early Learning Centers

Interview by Kim Stahr, South Atlantic Conference associate superintendent of education, with Katie Johnson, director of Lamb Shelter Early Learning Center in Albany, Ga.

KG: What has been the driving force which motivated you to stay at Lamb Shelter for all of these years?

KJ: My concern for the development of all children grew after reading the statistic in a research project many years ago which showed a decrease of interest and achievement in males after reaching the third grade. At the time, this trend was especially present in four of the counties that I was employed as an early childhood educator. It is an honor to be able to serve God in the nurturing of children. All through the Scriptures we find records that indicate the importance of our children and their training (Isaiah 54:13). In The Covenant of Peace, the Lord says, "Your sons and daughters growing up will be taught by the Lord and great will be the peace of your people." Therefore, training begins as soon as a child is conceived.

KG: Share with me your thoughts on the true meaning of early childhood education.

KJ: Early education means the dedication of all our children to God in the same way that the temple is dedicated to God (1 Kings 8:63). God blessed me with this desire to work and help fill the great disconnect in early childhood training between the home and the school. The child needs to be loved and nurtured, especially from birth to seven years. A number of children have been left out or pushed away from opportunities to learn about God's love for every creature that He created.

KG: I am sure you have witnessed many changes during your tenure as director. In your opinion, how have the parental and societal expectations, with regards to early childhood education, changed during the past 28 years?

KJ: The structure of our growing society has placed a variety of pitfalls that can cause harm to our duties and responsibilities for the nurturing of our children. Grandparents are no longer a part of the family group, mothers are taken out of the home to provide an income, fathers are absent from family circles, and values have shifted from God to things. The training of children becomes a shared responsibility between parents and early childhood facilitators, homes, daycare providers, or other substitutes for nurturing and early training of our children.

KG: Every teacher has a dream for her students. What's yours, Mrs. Johnson?

KJ: Education has an impact on our salvation, even beyond our own life. Ellen White, in Child Guidance, p. 38, says, "To parents is committed the great work of educating and training their children for the future, immortal life." However, in the times we are living, I feel that everyone needs to join in this educational process for all of our children. Therefore, for 28 years our mission at Lamb Shelter has been to provide for the families and children of east Albany and Dougherty County, Ga., an opportunity to receive training in a safe, nurturing environment where all children can grow physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. We are blessed at the center with a Bible-based, structural learning curriculum to meet the child's needs, regardless of race, color, sex, nationality, or physical ability. It is my prayer that each child who has attended Lamb Shelter, and the more than 325 children who have graduated from the center, will have the desire to serve God and tell others about His love.

Johnson has a master's degree in guidance counseling from the University of Georgia, and she's a member of Emanuel Church in Albany.
Eagerness might be the best way to describe the 18 pre-K and kindergarten students who attend the Adventist Christian Academy (ACA) in Panama City, Florida. Some students look up and smile when they see me, the woman with the camera, enter their classroom. As I walk quietly by their tables, they enthusiastically show me what they are working on. It doesn’t take long to conclude that these four- and five-year-olds love their school.

The student’s eagerness to learn is surpassed only by that of teacher Melissa Aldridge’s zeal to teach them. Aldridge, who had 20 years of experence teaching in public school before she began teaching at ACA two years ago, says, “I love teaching here! In public school I felt my hands were tied — I could tell my students about the Golden Rule, but I couldn’t tell them about Jesus. Now I can share Jesus with my students every day.”

Two thirds of the children who attend the pre-kindergarten class are from the community, and are not members of the Adventist church. They attend as a result of Florida’s Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten (VPK) program. Most of the pre-K students continue to attend through kindergarten. Now parents, with their students, choose to continue sending their children to ACA. As a result, the school is seeing an increase in enrollment in their 1st through 8th grade classes.

A few years ago the school was struggling and enrollment was declining. Kenneth Swaine, chairman of the School Board, says, “That’s when we decided to rededicate the school as a ministry vehicle to reach the community. Once the school was committed to ministry, the Lord started blessing us.” Now the school has become a major part of evangelism and outreach for the church. The children hear Bible stories and learn about Jesus. They go home and tell their parents what they have learned, and the parents become interested in learning more. In addition, the school plans events throughout the year for the parents to attend. At these events the parents meet the pastor and have an opportunity to sign up for Bible studies. As a result, four adults have been baptized and several others have requested baptism. Two of the individuals baptized were Ken and Melissa Aldridge. Melissa is now the pre-K and kindergarten teacher. She became interested in the church after she enrolled her son in the pre-K program at ACA.

It has taken hard work, prayer, and dedication to attain the success the school is experiencing. Eighteen children are enrolled in the pre-K and kindergarten program, and there’s a waiting list. Sandra Pinkard, ACA principal and teacher for 5th through 8th grades, saw the possibility of becoming a part of the VPK program when Maquel Shurtleff, teacher for 1st through 4th grades, mentioned it to her. One of the requirements for the school to become a VPK facility was the administrator must be a certified child care center director, which meant that Pinkard would need to take 45 hours of classwork. In spite of all her other responsibilities, she accepted the challenge and plunged ahead. God had given a vision of what the school could become, and nothing would stop her.

Swaine declares, “This is a miracle. Good things are happening for our school and church because of our school evangelism program.” Evidence of this occurred October 29, 2015, when the school held an open house and spaghetti supper. Of 90 people who attended, 70 were not church members. Larry Owens, Panama City Church pastor, gave a devotion. 
Ridgetop Adventist Elementary Affirms its Pre-K Program

Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it.” Proverbs 22:6. This biblical model for early childhood development is one that Ridgetop Adventist Elementary School (RAES) has made the central focus of its newly introduced pre-K program. RAES, nestled in the rural community of Ridgetop, Tenn., is an Adventist EDGE accredited pre-K through 8th-grade school.

In today’s society where more parents are working outside the home, there is a demanding need for more programs that bring a balance to both the spiritual and academic needs of children, who are so impressionable during their early childhood years. Research emphasizes the importance of intentional and purposeful education in the early childhood years (birth to age 7) as a child’s spiritual identity is being developed.

The ultimate goal of the RAES pre-K program is to help children foster a love and friendship with Jesus by providing a balanced curriculum that helps develop the whole child — spiritually, academically, and physically. Children learn through exploratory play and hands-on lessons in a Christ-centered environment. Little characters are modeled and shaped after Him. Jesus says in Matthew 18:4-5, “Therefore, whoever humbles himself like a child is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven. And whoever comes a little child like this in My name welcomes Me.”

BY CRYSTAL M. CARNEY, RAES PRE-K/K TEACHER

Student Kenric Andino goes “down on the farm” in the pre-K classroom.
Addie Lee Myrick Retires with Legacy of Dedicated Service

Addie Lee Myrick was honored at her retirement celebration on January 10, 2016. It was not difficult to acknowledge and join in the celebration for this special occasion. Myrick has an established record of 35 years of remarkable leadership at the Bethany Seventh-day Adventist Church Day Care Center in Montgomery, Ala. It was not by chance that she assumed directorship in August 1980, following the transfer of Samuel J. Jackson and his wife.

Under her leadership, the Center experienced growth in enrollment and staff performance. Myrick held high expectations for the entire staff.

The Center was originally located in the fellowship hall of Bethany Church. In 1993, a grand opening and dedication of the new Center occurred under the leadership of Roy Patterson, pastor, and Bennie Smith, elder, in a joint effort to accomplish this goal.

A strong, productive parent/teacher study group was organized. With the effort of this group and other resources, the mortgage of $42,900 was paid off in 1998. As the efforts continued, the property behind the new building was purchased for a fenced-in playground, and paid for by the Center.

At the height of enrollment, there were 136 children. Three facilities were used to house the enrollment. Center 1 had six classes housed in the current facility, Center 2 had six classes housed in the fellowship hall, and Center 3 had two classes housed in the Bethany Christian Academy (BCA) building.

The Center provided funds to supplement the operation of BCA. A structured academic program was initiated with the appropriate curriculum materials for each age group.

Under the leadership of the parent/teacher study group, activities were organized to promote growth and profit. Some of the results included the following:

1. An annual king and queen contest that provided funds for various projects, and provided participants for the Thanksgiving parade.
2. Purchase of a 22-passenger bus for use by the Center.
3. Purchase of large playground equipment items.
4. Computers for a computer station for Center 1.

Strong leadership and a goal for excellence have motivated the Center to develop a strong teaching staff, maintain high scores in the food program, and maintain Alabama state licensing. Bethany thanks Addie Lee Myrick for her years of dedicated service.

By Dorthy Sanders
A BELOVED BUTTERFLY is released

BY LORI FUTcher

LaRayne Hall is a teacher who loves her students. She has faithfully served at Bowman Hills School for 22 years, and has decided to take flight to experience a well-deserved retirement.

Every year, the kindergartners at Bowman Hills School in Cleveland, Tennessee, watch with excitement as caterpillars spin their cocoons and later emerge as butterflies. Then comes the day they have all been waiting for. With great celebration, the butterflies are released to fly away and begin a new stage of their lives.

It was with even greater fanfare that the school, along with friends and alumni, celebrated kindergarden teacher LaRayne Hall's 22 years of service at Bowman Hills, and released her into retirement.

“This is not goodbye,” said Hall, who plans to continue as a volunteer. “It’s just hello from the other side of the room.”

Hall began her career in Spearfish, South Dakota, at a one-room school with 12 students in six different grades — and no assistant. That experience quickly taught her how to determine the main concept in a lesson, and teach that lesson to various grade levels, adjusting the assignments accordingly.

As she taught, Hall would mull over Ellen White’s blueprint for education she had learned about in the Philosophy of Education class she took from George Knight. Soon a dream began to form, and as she started mentioning that dream to others, they got excited. One woman got so excited with Hall’s ideas, she offered her ranch house to be used as a school. “And, I would love to send my son there,” the woman told her.

So Hall incorporated Springs of Life Christian School, where she taught reading from the Bible, and included practical arts in her curriculum. Since the ranch house backed up to the National Forest, science lessons often included excursions into the woods.

“That was probably the most fun anybody could every have,” says Hall.

Her students seemed to agree. Recently, she ran into one of her students, now fully grown, who told her, “Those were absolutely the best years of my life.”

The only thing that made that situation less than ideal was the lack of funds, so
after four years she moved to Oklahoma, where she did substitute teaching in the public school system before being hired to teach in a one-room school in Venice, Florida. During her four years there, she helped the school grow from five to 16 students before moving on to St. Petersburg, Florida, where she received the Zappa Excellence in Teaching Award.

It was also in St. Petersburg where she met her husband. Allen Hall visited her church, where his friend Mark Schiefer, was a member and school board chair. Immediately, Allen Hall asked to meet her. But she wasn’t so sure. “He’s not my type,” she decided quickly. Soon, however, the two were talking, and as time passed and they got to know each other better, he suggested she send her resume to the Georgia-Cumberland Conference so they could be closer together.

“No way!” was her immediate response. “I’m not leaving my wonderful school and church family.”

Later, while at a women’s retreat, Hall was challenged to consider what might be keeping her from a closer walk with God. As she reflected on that challenge while walking through the woods, she felt overwhelmingly impressed that selfishness was the answer — but she couldn’t figure out how she was being selfish.

So she sat on a tree stump and prayed, “Talk to me, Lord. What am I being selfish about?”

The answer was almost audible. “You’ve never asked me if I want you to move.”

Still not wanting to relocate, Hall responded, “If you want me to move, you are going to have to make it so clear that I cannot fight it.” Then she had an idea. She hadn’t been able to find her resume file. So she promised that if she located her resume, she would send it to the Georgia-Cumberland Conference. But, her promise came with a stipulation. “I’m not going to look for it,” she told God, “You’re going to have to drop it in my lap.”

True to word, not only did she not look for her resume, but she avoided any cabinet where she thought it might be hiding. It wasn’t much later when, while looking for March activities, she moved some items to the side and a file folder fell on her lap. It was her resume file.

Keeping her promise to God, she updated her resume and sent it to the Georgia-Cumberland Conference. Soon she had a call. Not only was the school in Alan Hall’s conference, it was connected with his home church — Bowman Hills.

Hall quickly became part of the Bowman Hills family.

“It didn’t take long for me to be impressed with LaRayne’s spirituality,” says Donna Nudd, who worked alongside Hall at the Bowman Hills School for many years.

For 10 years, Hall served not only as a teacher at Bowman Hills but also as the school’s principal. Under her leadership, the school started a hot lunch program, and an annual rummage sale to support the band.

The rummage sale, which brought in about $2,000 its first year, was so successful that soon it began funding other projects as well, such as a new playground for the students. In recent years the sale has grown to bring in around $20,000 annually — having contributed nearly half a million dollars to the school over the last 19 years.

But, perhaps the biggest contribution Hall made to Bowman Hills while serving as principal was helping to save the band program that was in danger of being discontinued. Having been a music major in college, Hall understood deeply the importance of music education.

“I have had many principals,” says Bruce Kuist, who served as band director of the OAKBOW band (a combined band for the Ooltewah and Bowman Hills schools) for many years, “and I have found Mrs. Hall to be one of the best. Thank you, Mrs. Hall, for saving the band and supporting it all these years.”

In 2007, Hall stepped down from being principal in order to pursue her master’s degree. She, however, continued teaching kindergarten at Bowman Hills. By this time, the school had grown to include a pre-kindergarten class that she taught alongside her kindergarten students.

Her classroom was so popular, that soon students were turned away. And so, she helped the school in another major transition — receiving accreditation for a stand-alone pre-K. Rehearsing the pre-K students into the capable hands of Pat Reese, Hall has spent the last couple years of her career focusing on preparing large classes of kindergartners for first grade.

“How blessed our children have been,” says Felicito Fernando, who had several children pass through her classroom.

Amy Hunt, Hall’s first pre-K student, who is now a junior at Georgia-Cumberland Academy, agrees. “You are the foundation of my learning,” she says.

And so, as Bowman Hills releases Hall into the next stage of her life, there is a mixture of tears and smiles — tears, for she will surely be missed. And yet, those who know her cannot help but smile when they think of the many caterpillars LaRayne Hall has helped shape into beautiful butterflies. ☺
Upper-Grade, Lower-Grade Students Form Friendships at Coble Elementary

John L. Coble Elementary in Calhoun, Ga., opened the school year with a mixed-age initiative. “The students came up with this idea themselves,” says Lisa Miller, Student Association sponsor. “Their goal was to set the tone for the new school year by having a bonding experience between upper-grade and lower-grade students.”

Teachers set aside time for upper-grade students to interact one-on-one with the lower-grade students in their classrooms. Pre-kindergarten and kindergarten students put together alphabet puzzles, and wrote words and letters on magnetic boards while getting acquainted with their new friends.

“Coble Elementary has emphasized the importance of cross-aged bonding of students for several years,” says Richard Stitzer, principal. “Building trust between older and younger students helps to unite us as a family.”

At the beginning of each school year, students are assigned to a mixed-aged “family” group with a faculty sponsor. Once a month for assembly, the family groups sit together and then separate into classrooms, and participate in a short activity led by the eighth-grade students in each group. For example, these small groups have sorted clothing for the God’s Closet charity, enclosed handmade greeting cards in soup kitchen baskets, and enjoyed a Bible scavenger hunt around the school.

At the beginning of every school year, the eighth-grade students go on a retreat designed to build community within their class, and encourage them to be leaders within the school. “Hopefully the students are learning that spiritual leadership can be rewarding and fun,” says Stitzer.

BY GAYLE FULMERO

November 2016
Berean Child Development Center Has “Listen, Learn, Have Fun” Motto

Berean Child Development Center

I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me,” is the mantra of Daria-Louise Darius, director of Berean Child Development Center (BCDC) in Atlanta, Ga., as she reflects on the growth and progress of the Center during the past few years.

On first impression, the Center is visually inviting, with a goal to provide a childcare center that values kindness and respect for each other in a nurturing and supporting setting. Darins explains, “We are very proud of our Center, and are anxious to make your child’s first learning experiences meaningful and happy. The choice to blend a Christian atmosphere with good learning materials, in a place that is fun and challenging for children, makes BCDC a special place. I am deeply involved in the children’s development in fun and learning. A recent (and ongoing) remodeling of the school had been a vision I had from God, and I’m grateful for the time, effort, and donations that have made this project possible. I had already developed a pre-conceived criterion for BCDC, which was based on God’s Word, ‘I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me,’ Philippians 4:13. That bit of wisdom served as my guiding principle.

“The early years are critical in the life of a child and form the basis for character development and access to later formal education. Preschool is a great way to begin building the foundation of a child’s future. Established in 19562 as an extension of the Atlanta-Berean Church, the Center has now served the community for more than 54 years, and looks forward to many more years of service to the community. BCDC offers transitional experiences that extend the home into the school. As such, it provides a flexible program which considers the developmental stages of children, as well as their individual differences. In this environment, the children are stimulated to explore, think, discover, experiment, speak, manipulate, model, and create.

“Our Aim: To offer competent Christian child care for families of young children throughout the community.

“Our Philosophy: Cultivate the development of the proper balance with the spiritual, intellectual, physical, and practical aspects of life.

“Our Mission: Glorify God by partnering with families in our church and community to provide quality Christian childcare, education, and development opportunities that will honor our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. “Our Motto is Listen, Learn, and have Fun!”

The Center provides educational day-care programs designed for toddlers up to pre-kindergarten students. It offers a summer camp program designed for elementary children ages six to 12 years old. Also, the Center provides enrichment classes in music, Spanish, drama, and extra-curriculum in violin and soccer.

Visitors are welcome at BCDC. Call 404-799-7287, or email bereanchild@gmail.com.

Three-year-old students in a BCDC classroom

BY DARIA-Louise DARIOUS

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Highland Elementary Pre-kindergarten/Kindergarten Program Highlighted

It was a day full of excitement as the students entered the classroom one Monday morning late in October 2016. Students entered the doors dressed in costumes from countries all over the world, bearing food samples and show-and-tell items from around the globe. After a monthlong unit studying about life on each continent, the students enjoyed a day culminating the events by simulating one last visit to each continent. One student said, “When can we go in the airplane again, Mrs. Shoemaker? That was so much fun!” As each continent was revisited, the students took a pretend trip on Pre-K/K Airlines, traveling from one destination to the next. At each stop the students experienced food, games, and music, and enjoyed making a craft from that particular continent.

The pre-K-kindergarten program at Highland Elementary (HE) is a daily adventure. Whether it’s learning about the alphabet, seeing first-hand the stages of a butterfly, or taking an imaginary trip around the world, the goal at Highland is to instill a love of learning at an early age. Students are encouraged to approach learning with many hands-on experiences, including being imaginative, creative, and investigative, all while in a safe, nurturing environment.

The combined pre-K-kindergarten program at HE has been in place since 2007. Highland received State of Tennessee approval for pre-kindergarten in 2015, which allows for many more pre-kindergarten students to enroll. Pre-kindergarten is offered as either a part-time or full-time program to help meet the needs of the families in the community.

For the teacher, the most important aspect of each school day is the ability to weave Jesus throughout the day in everything said and done. Each day, the Adventist message and the love of Jesus are shared with the students. It is the desire of the HE staff that the students have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, and a lifelong walk with Him. ●

BY MELISSA SHOEMAKER
Teaching a Message of HOPE AND WHOLENESS

BY THE SOUTHERN UNION OFFICE OF EDUCATION TEAM

What does hope and wholeness look like to a child, and what correlation could there possibly be between shoelaces, hope, and wholeness? Ann Arquitt, a teacher at the Floral Crest School in Birmingham, Alabama, shares the following experience that may give us a glimpse.

On Friday, Gunner learned to tie his shoes, and that is such an important milestone; it was just such a beautiful moment, that I could not resist sharing this experience, the joy that you could feel in the moment.

Gunner: "I just tied my shoe all by myself! I just practiced the skills you showed me. I just did it! I tied them both, I didn't even mess up and have to tie them over.

His words and joy were effervescent. Gunner was walking around the classroom exuberantly smiling, back straight, and completely delighted with his accomplishment and the acquisition of such a powerful new skill.

Teacher: "I am so proud for you.

Gunner: "I was thrilled, too. Now I don't have to have anyone help me tie my shoes. It's easy once you learn."
Pensacola Junior Academy Has Successful School Year

With a thriving robotics program led by Kristy Mobley, and a growing kindergarten program taught by Heather Hauffe, Pensacola Junior Academy (PJA) in Pensacola, Fla., had a great year. Thanks to the state of Florida’s initiative program, Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten (VPK), the PJA early childhood program will be expanding next year to include pre-K as well. Families with children who cannot afford to send their children to pre-K will be able to under the VPK program. Hauffe believes that, “The biggest benefit of these childhood programs is that it gets the kids into the routine of school, and it feeds them developmentally. Some kids are already doing first-grade work.” The school has a warm, family atmosphere where each child can feel welcomed and wanted. The school’s robotics program gives students the opportunity to learn critical thinking and problem solving skills. “I think every school should have this program. Problem solving and building is fabulous,” said Mobley. Stan Hobbs, education superintendent for Gulf States Conference, had nothing but good things to say. “We believe that PJA is a school any member of this community would love to attend,” said Hobbs, adding, “This [PJA] is a great learning environment characterized by individualized, Christ-centered instruction from teachers who really care.” The school family looks forward to bigger things from PJA next year.

Pensacola Junior Academy students in the robotics program include Mason Kelley (left), 4th grade; Ben Algarin, 5th grade; and Peyton Kelley, 6th grade.

Kindergarten teacher Heather Hauffe helps a child with an assignment.
Ridgetop Pre-K/K Students “Operate” With Vowels

Pre-K and Kindergarten (pre-K/K) are essential to the foundation of a person’s education. Once that foundation is laid, and laid firmly through care, patience, and persistence, the building can begin and continue for a lifetime.

Branching out from the basic phonemic awareness and letter identification at Ridgetop Elementary School in Ridgetop, Tenn., gradually led to using new phonics skills to put sounds together in simple words for the pre-K/K students.

After simple words came a fun activity called Vowel Surgery. Within a few more months of word studies, phoneme reviews, and leveled readers, it was time to prep the “operating room.”

While the pre-K/K students were at recess, their teacher, Shannon Armantrout, transformed the classroom into an operating room: changed into nurses’ scrubs, gloves, hat, and surgical mask; and ran outside with a siren. “Emergency! Emergency!” she said. “Please come help me. I need doctors.” The students froze, confused, but when they began to realize what was going on, they ran over quickly. Armantrout explained, “I have patients in here that need your help to be put back together. They’ve lost their vowels. We must have a doctors’ meeting immediately to discuss how to help them. Meet me in library right away.”

In the library, the students reviewed the five vowels. Once everyone was appropriately dressed for surgery, charts with a page for each patient stapled inside were distributed. The doctors were then paired up and began operating. It was slow at first as they became acclimated to the activity and what needed to be done. But, they began to quickly locate the missing vowels, place them on the word, and then record their findings in their charts. In the end, all patients were stable and recovering well, thanks to the help of 10 doctors working hard to return vowels to their appropriate place.

It’s always exciting to learn in a new and fun way! ☺

BY SHANNON ARMANTROUT

Florida Conference, August 2017

Learning Tree Academy Holds Graduation

Learning Tree Academy at the Apopka, Fla., Church held its annual baccalaureate program on May 20, 2017. The morning message delivered by Sandra Doran*, then associate superintendent of education at Florida Conference, encouraged the young people to never give up. The service was enhanced by testimonials from former students.

Graduation was held during a weeknight with 31 children participating. This outreach ministry, which has served the community for more than 20 years, is a quality children’s day care service licensed and approved by the state of Florida for children two months to five years of age.

The philosophy of Learning Tree Academy follows Proverbs 22:6: “Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it.”

*Sandra Doran, Ed.D., was recently appointed head of schools for North Tampa Christian Academy near Wesley Chapel, a 21st-century innovative campus on 43 acres, which will be opening in the fall of 2018. ☺

BY ROBERT BROOME

The dedication of the Learning Tree Academy staff to develop the children emotionally, spiritually, physically, and cognitively was clearly evident by the graduates’ smiling faces.
Teachers need to understand how media culture is affecting children and families, and to find effective ways to promote children’s healthy development in today’s media-saturated environment,” states Diane E. Levin in her book *Beyond Remote-controlled Childhood: Teaching Young Children In The Media Age*.

Early childhood directors, teachers, and education superintendents from nine schools and early childhood centers in the Gulf States and South Central conferences gathered September 27, 2017, for the annual Southwest Early Childhood Education (SWECE) meetings at the Gulf States Conference office in Montgomery, Ala. Tamara Libonati, Southern Union associate director of early childhood education, and Eugene Brewer, Ed.D., retired development specialist from the Southern Union, concluded a four-part workshop for teachers to help parents understand the well-documented negative effects of media on the future
good. They were joined by Gene Brewer, Ed.D., retired development specialist from the Southern Union, who spoke to early childhood educators about the importance of understanding how media affects young children.

Through discussions and a “think-tank” forum, teachers discussed ways of helping parents rethink the amount and type of screen time they permit for their young children. The biannual meetings provide early childhood teachers a unique opportunity for specialized professional development and collaboration as they seek to create spirit-filled educational centers for their young charges.

*By Suzy Gloudeman, M.S.*
What kind of turtle is this? Why are the things on the ground like sticks, leaves, and grass turning black? Why do spiders make webs on the ground? Will this leaf float if it has holes in it?” These are typical questions asked by students in the Forest Kindergarten program at Ridgetop Adventist Elementary School (RAES) in Ridgetop, Tenn. This is the first year Shannon Armantrout, pre-K-K teacher, has put into practice the theories of Forest Kindergarten. Forest Kindergarten is based on the German model of total nature immersion and authentic play. There is no predetermined curriculum. Each day’s lesson plan is determined from what nature presents and from the children’s interest. The teacher, who is the mentor, allows students to spend time outdoors in nature, where branches and dirt replace whiteboards and desks. God is the teacher in this Forest Kindergarten program. Here valuable lessons about caring for nature and each other are learned in an authentic way.

This outdoor hands-on curriculum encourages imagination, play, and creativity. Two days a week, 11 students put on their boots, grab their water bottles, and head out to the wooded area on the grounds of RAES. Within a few minutes, children are looking for insects and jumping from logs, some into puddles from yesterday’s rain. Boys are dragging logs through the woods to build a fort. In another area, sticks and branches become a dental office where several sit waiting for the dentist to check their teeth.

For two and a half hours, toys are replaced by the imaginative use of sticks, rocks, and leaves. In the forest, students write their letters and numbers with sticks, build a bridge over a mud puddle, or create a seesaw with a big rock and a large beam. They create shapes and sort colors using sticks, leaves, and rocks — all this without traditional textbooks and worksheets. These four- and five-year-olds have gained understanding in many concepts and facts about their physical world they otherwise may not have learned for months or years. God has become more real and personal to them as they talk about what they found, built, observed, or learned in their forest.

Ellen White wrote, “The fields and hills — nature’s audience chamber — should be the schoolroom for the little children. Her treasures should be their textbook. The lessons thus imprinted upon their minds will not be soon forgotten,” Child Guidance, page 48. Grab your boots and join these students in the forest for some exciting learning! 🍃

By Pam Williams and Shannon Armantrout
Community leaders and church members of the Grace Fellowship Church came together Friday, March 16, 2018, in Madison, Ala., to break ground on their new church expansion project. About 50 believers began meeting in March 2003, renting space from a local Presbyterian church to hold Sabbath services. In nearly a year’s time, they transitioned to official church status, and they felt that God was leading them to move to a different facility. Three years later, with much prayer, they began the process of purchasing a property of their own.

They found a piece of property that included a house with six acres of land. However, the house needed remodeling to serve as a church. The group was nervous about taking on the responsibility of a mortgage, renovating the house, and maintaining the rental fee of the Presbyterian church, but God made it clear this was the place for them. God provided for them right when they needed it, and they completed the house renovations in about six months. With the remodel complete, and the rental fee out of the way, all that remained was the $300K mortgage. God stepped in again, and the loan was paid in full in about 18 months. Through God’s grace and the stewardship of the members, Grace Fellowship was able to acquire additional property without the need for loans, purchasing the property in lump sums. The church intends to use the combined property to build a new facility that will not only provide a more spacious place for worship, but also support the launch of a church school, Grace Preparatory Academy. The school will start with two early childhood education classrooms for 3- and 4-year-olds, and will expand to include kindergarten and higher grades in the future.

Jaime Pombo, pastor of Grace Fellowship, made it clear in his remarks at the groundbreaking ceremony that, “We have never wanted to acquire property simply to give us a bigger plot of land to occupy. Grace Fellowship has a set of values and goals that we have collectively embraced, and at the heart of all those values and goals is the desire to serve our community. As Peter says, ‘Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God’s grace in its various forms.’ We are not building to provide a bigger, more comfortable place for us to sit during church. We want to make a difference by serving our community.”

Pombo and other church leaders maintain that the development of Grace Fellowship is purely God’s doing. He is the one who has provided every resource the church has needed from the very beginning, and He is the One who will continue to provide as the members place faith in Him.

BY LINDA FREEMAN
Ephesus Early Learning Center
Growing the Village

At Ephesus Early Learning Center “It takes a village” is more than just a nice, catchy saying. It is the hinge point of their daily operations. They are a city set upon the hill, cooperating with parents, the church, the elementary school, and their broader community in preparing little lambs to take their next steps in being good learners and citizens on Earth and in Heaven. The children are encouraged to grow and learn in a Christ-centered environment which is safe, nurturing, and filled with opportunities for exploration and discovery. The program is well rounded, and provides opportunities for structured classroom activities, while the children also have the freedom to learn through creative, independent activities.

In order to fuel both body and spirit, a healthy serving of “soul food” is served, developing character and pointing the children to Jesus. In addition to feeding the soul, the center takes pride in serving a variety of healthful, wholesome meals to the children to complete the trans-disciplinary, integrated learning experience offered by Ephesus Early Learning Center.

At Ephesus, art is one of their favorite activities. Students enjoy drawing, cutting, pasting, and of course, painting. Another favorite activity is when Gloria Cain from the Winston-Salem Library reads to them. They are also learning the value of service through helping others by asking parents and friends to collect donations for those less fortunate.

BY JOYCE HAIRSTON, DIRECTOR OF EPHEMUS EARLY LEARNING CENTER
What My Young Students HAVE TAUGHT ME

BY JENNIFER GENNICK

Jennifer Gennick shares her personal testimony.

I have been a teacher for 17 years, with the last six in a K4/K5 classroom. Currently, I am serving the Mobile Junior Academy in Mobile, Alabama. Every year I learn new lessons about kids, about God, and about myself.

My students come from many backgrounds, cultures, and different experiences with God. They come to me having different levels of knowledge and understanding. Those first few weeks of school always bring interesting experiences as I get to know my little charges. They are each so unique and have different needs, fears, and abilities. I find myself listening and paying close attention to them as we get to know each other. Bringing these individuals and myself into a little community, or family, is my goal for those first few weeks of school.

Time and time again, I am reminded that God is right there, ready to help me through the day. When I forget to bring my little worries and troubles about my classroom to God, I become a bit hopeless. But, when I work, saying little prayers throughout the day, He never fails, whether it’s a prayer for patience, wisdom, or knowledge to help these little people work out their problems or to give me the help that I need for each situation.

Some folks may believe that Pre-K and kindergarten classrooms are not important to our Adventist schools. Today, though, so many families must have a dual income, and the little ones need a safe, happy learning environment that helps them get to know Jesus when they are unable to be with their families. Jesus said in Matthew 19:14, “Let the little children come to me, and forbid them not.” Kids need to know that God has a purpose and a plan for them. The earlier they can come to believe that God loves them and that they are a part of His family, the more hope and assurance they and their families will have.

Adventist school teachers are a part of an evangelistic effort nine months of every year. Moreover, that effort is not just for the older children.

I am not just a K4/K5 teacher. I am a Seventh-day Adventist evangelist K4/K5 teacher. What a humbling, awesome privilege that is.

Jennifer Gennick is a K4/K5 teacher at Mobile Junior Academy in Mobile, Alabama.
NORWIDA MARSHALL, ED.D.,

Retired Southern Union
Early Childhood Director, Passes

Norwidia A. Marshall, Ed.D., 82, of Lithonia, Georgia, formally of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, was born on July 20, 1936. She was the daughter of the late Thomas and Edna Marshall. Marshall grew up in Pittsburgh, and at an early age was baptized at the Ethan Temple Church in Pittsburgh. She was a faithful member of the Mountainside Church in Decatur, Georgia.

She was a graduate of Schenley High School. In 1958, she earned a bachelor’s degree in education at Tuskegee University in Tuskegee, Alabama, and began her extensive career as an elementary teacher and supervisor in Pennsylvania. She received her master’s degree from the University of Pittsburgh. Later, she obtained a doctoral degree at the University of Tennessee, and amassed credentials in the fields of teaching, writing, curriculum, and program development.

Marshall served a professor of education at Oakwood College (now Oakwood University) and Alabama A & M University, both in Huntsville, Alabama. She held the distinction of being both the first woman and first woman of color to be named associate director of education at the Southern Union. There she developed an impressive array of innovative curricular materials for both elementary and childhood education. When reading scores needed improving Unionwide, Marshall was the key developer of ARMS (Adventist Reading Management System), and assisted in developing 15 levels of K-8 reading books that are used not only in the Southern Union, but in the North American Division as well.

Marshall was esteemed for promoting an initiative and providing leadership and policy development for 72 early childhood education centers. Herein, she created procedural manuals, curriculum materials, handbooks, and advisory and steering committees.

She was voted Outstanding Educator in America, and was given the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventist “Award of Excellence.” As a consummate professional for more than 36 years, Marshall significantly improved the quality of education in Adventist schools.

She is survived by her sister, LaVerne McHarris; two nephews, Samuel “Butch” McGinnis and Richard “Rocky” McGinnis; one niece, Lynnie (John) Hunt; three great-nephews, Matthew, Ethan, and Jonathan Hunt; and a host of other relatives and friends. She was preceded in death by her parents; sister, Olivette McGinnis; and brothers-in-law, Sam McGinnis and Lawrence McHarris.
Memphis Junior Academy Pre-K/K Classroom Highlighted

Memphis Junior Academy (MJA) is a small school. When first entering the building, you pass the office and, if not paying attention, the science classroom tucked in next door might be missed. To the right are three other classrooms. But, at the very end of the corridor lies something special.

Upon entering it is evident that this room is not just any classroom. It has been designed with a specific purpose and audience in mind. The tables are shorter, with chairs that accommodate the smallest of bodies. The room is splash with happiness and wonder. This is not a regular classroom.

This is the pre-K/Kindergarten classroom.

MJA is one of five schools in the Kentucky-Tennessee Conference that have a pre-K/K classroom. This may not be the class where big tests are given, but it is the class where children fall in love with learning. Many of the students at MJA began their school experience in this classroom, including three graduating eighth graders.

For many children this classroom is their first experience outside of their homes. Their teacher will be the first person, besides their family, to have an opportunity to shape and influence them. This is the first time that they will become part of a “tribe” with peers rather than relatives. These are the years where children learn to “do school.” Pre-K/K is about discovery — this incredible world, how it all works together, and the Father in Heaven who created each child.

Rather than learning from textbooks, much of the learning is done in quick, hands-on segments. This audience does not have a very long attention span, and the teacher often feels like she is putting on an eight-hour variety show. When learning about dogs, it is no surprise to see the teacher’s Labrador has come for a visit. When it is time to explain what bones are for, don’t be surprised to see the budding biologists gloved up and dissecting rotisserie chickens. There is also singing, laughing, and downright silliness that comes out of this room. Listen closely. That is not just a silly song about Noah… these little voices are actually counting by twos and not even realizing it.

BY KAYLEE BAUGHMAN, PRE-K/K TEACHER

November 2018

Pam Williams Retires

Pam Williams, associate superintendent of education for the Kentucky-Tennessee Conference, will retire on December 31, 2018. Williams received her bachelor of arts degree in elementary education from Shepherd University, and her master of arts degree in curriculum and instruction from West Virginia University. Her career in education spans more than 43 years, and began in the West Virginia public school system in 1975.

Williams’ first adventure in teaching began at Mineral Wells Elementary School in West Virginia, where she taught for 20 years. Thirteen of those years she was a Title I math resource teacher working with remedial math students. She served on numerous K-6 math textbook adoptions for the public school system, and was involved in planning and implementing the first math labs in Wood County, W. Va. Williams was one of 12 math teachers to serve on the Education for Economic Security Act in West Virginia. In 1984, she was named Wood County Title I Teacher of the Year and West Virginia Title I Teacher of the Year. That same year she was selected as the West Virginia’s Leaders of Learning representative.

She has been a presenter of numerous math workshops for public schools, various conferences, and for students at Southern Adventist University, as well as a guest presenter at the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics at both West Virginia and Ohio State math conventions.

Williams and her family moved to Hawaii in 1995. There she taught seven years at the Windward Adventist School in Kailua, Hawaii. Williams taught all math classes for grades 1-6 for three of those years.

In 2002 she accepted a call from the Kentucky-Tennessee Conference to serve as associate superintendent of education. She came to the Conference with extensive curriculum experience, and was instrumental in implementing Singapore math. She used her experience to help teachers raise math scores. Her duties are many with a wide range of assignments, including supervising and working with the elementary teachers, planning professional development for the yearly teachers’ meetings, overseeing curriculum, and serving as the early childhood liaison for the Conference. In addition, she has served on numerous committees in the Southern Union.

The teachers and other Conference employees are sad to see her retire. Her infectious smile and constant dedication to Adventist education will be greatly missed.

Williams looks forward to her retirement. She plans to spend more time with her husband, Phil, and adult daughter, Jessica, travel to exciting places, and play more pickleball.

BY DENISE POPE

December 2018
A.W. Spalding Students Hold Human Hearts

Students in the early childhood classes at A.W. Spalding in Collegedale, Tenn., had an unusual hands-on experience. They were given the unique opportunity to hold a human heart as part of their biology unit, "All About Me." Special presenter Gordon Guild, D.O. (left), a local physician, taught the class.

The Early Childhood Education Center (ECEC) classes at A.W. Spalding in Collegedale, Tenn., had a more hands-on experience than they were anticipating. The three- to four-year-old students were given a unique opportunity to hold real human hearts.

Prior to the human hearts arriving in class, ECEC teacher Amy Wash began the class’ biology unit, “All About Me.” They started by learning how to put together human skeletons and vital organs through songs, visual aids, and hands-on diagrams. Wash had paper cutouts of skeletons and organs scaled to the size of the students’ bodies. With a song to help guide them, the students were able to put an entire human skeleton together by the end of the week. Unbeknownst to the class, a special surprise was in store.

During the week the class was putting together skeletons, Wash contacted Gordon Guild, D.O., a local physician in Ooltewah, Tenn., who has three grandsons in the Greater Collegedale School System. She asked him if he had anything he could bring to show the students. Guild happened to have access to two human hearts, one male and one female.

With all the parents’ permission, Guild came in to the classroom to present the hearts. All but two of the students, by their own choice, held the hearts with excitement and curiosity.

After getting over the formaldehyde odor, a barrage of questions came:

“How did you get the hearts?”
“Why do they smell like that?”
“Why are they that color? I thought hearts were red.”

Guild took the time to ease the students concerns, and explained how some people volunteer their bodies for science after they die. He then explained the hearts’ color and size differences between genders, as well as why the students could improve the health of their own hearts.

When explaining the heart’s size differences, Guild said, “Despite the male heart being bigger, the female heart has just as much love to give.”

The ECEC classes are no strangers to unique hands-on experiences or visitors. As Wash stated, “We’ve had a scuba diver, a pilot, police and baker owner of Piece-a-Cake Bakery come into the classroom before.”

These opportunities and the many to come are sure to serve as a testament to the dedication of the ECEC teachers to their students’ hearts, minds, and futures.

BY BRENDAN HALL, COLLEGEDALE ACADEMY SOPHOMORE
Asheville-Pisgah is Learning, Growing, Shining

There’s no busier classroom in any elementary school than a kindergarten classroom. Add the pre-kindergarten (pre-K) children and the happy chaos doubles. At Asheville-Pisgah Christian School (APCS), the pre-K and kindergarten students, led by their teacher, Alisha Michael, engage in an intentional balance of age-appropriate play and academics, interwoven with the love of Jesus Christ and the scriptural teachings of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Each week students dive into a new biblical, seasonal, holiday-related, or science- or social studies-based theme, both teacher-created and derived from the Southern Union curriculum. Making self-portraits during “Jesus Loves Me Week”; studying animal habitats for “Life at the Zoo Week”; and watching a pumpkin decompose, picking apples at the orchard, and hunting for acorns like twitchy squirrels during autumn-themed weeks are just a few things you’d see Michael’s students doing.

Peek in when the weather’s cold, and children might be acting as Mary and Joseph in Las Posadas (a Latin American Christmas tradition), exploring polar life by waddling about like penguins while balancing an egg on their feet, or creating blanket caves to “hibernate” in. When spring arrives, they fly homemade kites during “Windy Weather Week,” watch God’s miracle of metamorphosis at work in tiny tadpoles, and spend “At the Beach Week” listening for crashing waves inside seashells.

As for the traditional subjects, the masterfully written curriculum provides both pre-K and kindergarten-age levels with the opportunity to learn basic pre-reading, reading, and mathematics skills through a rich variety of games, activities, and projects. Yes, some time is allotted at the table with pencil and paper, but hands-on learning rules the day. Art, P.E., music, and library with other loving, supportive teachers give the students a well-rounded school experience.

Most importantly, APCS pre-K and kindergarten students encounter Jesus, Prayer, singing, and Bible stories brighten each morning and set the tone for the hours ahead. A monthly focus on such concepts as empathy, generosity, compassion, and trustworthiness transforms young children from hearers into doers.

Pre-K and kindergarten days at Asheville-Pisgah Christian School are fun, educational, and relationship-building. As the school motto boldly proclaims, every day they’re “Learning, Growing, Shining!”

BY ALISHA MICHAEL