

NEW
Gusto
INSIDE

HERMAN THE GERMAN

BY ROB D'AMICO

getta life...getta good life
the good life

NO. 46 • JULY 2001

FREE



**Peaceful
Children**

*Montessori and the
Policy of Inclusion*

by Ken Martin

SEX • POLITICS • FITNESS • GARDENS • OUT & ABOUT • FOOD • TRAVEL • HEALTH • WORK

TABLE OF CONTENTS
JULY 2001



PHOTO BY BARTON WILCOX CUSTOM IMAGES

James Foley.

FEATURES

DEPARTMENTS

Herman the German 17

by Rob D'Amico
You hear a lot about the hot new bands that break out of the pack to sign with big labels. What about the working musicians who make ends meet any way they can, toil away in Austin's musical vineyards and, obvious talent be damned, never seem to hit the big time? Herman Dietrich, better known as Herman the German of Das Cowboy, has been twanging Austin for twenty-five years.

eBay Changes History? 21

by Mary Tarkowski
What if foresighted forefathers had packed away those knickknacks and odds and ends and passed them along to grateful heirs who would someday sell them for big bucks in the granddaddy of all auctions, the on-line service eBay? The writer imagines this probably would have changed history.

Global Warming 23

by Karen Woodin
On June 7 *The New York Times* reported that top American scientists declared global warming is a real problem and it's getting worse. The scientists blame the heat on greenhouse gases. Our freethinking correspondent has a far more interesting theory of what's turning up the earth's thermostat.

Peaceful Children 24

by Ken Martin
While children are to some extent malleable, they are not pieces of plastic to be rammed into a mold for the kind of adults that society would like our educational system to produce. Children are natural learners and will work hard to acquire knowledge if allowed to explore and learn in the ways that suit their individual natures. That was the theory of Maria Montessori, who started the first Montessori classroom in 1907. Sixty years later, Donna Bryant Goertz started the Austin Montessori School. After thirty-five years in the classroom, Goertz has shared her conclusions in a new book that should interest all parents, educators, and politicians who shape our educational system.

Letter from the Editor 4 **Edibles** 13

by Ken Martin
Donna Bryant Goertz may have a solution to the vexing problem of violence in our schools.

by Karen Leach
If you're feeling groggy by mid-afternoon, maybe you need to rethink your lunch menu.

Letter from the Publisher 5 **Journeys** 14

by Rebecca Melançon
If you don't have a child in your life, let one in and discover the world through their eyes.

by Rita DeBellis
Our island-hopping travel writer hits the beaches of Tobago, scarfs the local cuisine and maps out a laid-back vacation—all for you.

Letters 6 **Healthcare** 14

Reader says "Rite of Passage" article sexist.

by Kathy Mitchell
Public scrutiny of New York cardiac surgeons is credited with improving the quality of care. Texans are kept in the dark about problems.

Intimacies 7 **Faces** 15

by Lynn Branz
A disastrous day trip on a bicycle built for two brings tenderness to a tempestuous couple.

by Laura Barton
Kathy Kasprisin is a triplegic and can use only her left arm, but her fearless attitude and sense of adventure makes her life exciting.

Seeking Spirit 8 **Austin Originals** 22

by Becca Remsley
When her hulking mini-teen careers through mom's day, she finds comfort in Mark Twain.

by Carolyn Banks
Hamburger? Shake? Prozac? For more than fifty years you've been able to get what you need at this Clarksville hangout. Nau Enfield Drug.

Alternative Healthcare 9 **Out & About** 29

by Leslie Belt
Your genetic inheritance factors into your life expectancy but you can add good years by taking some simple advice from RealAge.

Compiled by Linda McNabb
It's hot, hot, hot but there's plenty to do all around town, so let's go have some fun.
"The Chairs" 29
Jaston Williams of "Tuna" fame stars with Karen Jones in the revival of Eugene Ionesco's absurdist classic, at the State Theater.

Fitness 10 **Austin Chamber Music Festival** 31

by Lyn La Cava
What could be better in the heat of July than hitting the pool for some in-the-water workouts that don't involve doing laps? Here's how.

A dozen concerts fill the schedule for the Austin Chamber Music Center's fifth annual festival, July 2 through July 21.
The Philadelphia Story 32
Philadelphia's downtown is alive and growing, despite the city's loss of population. Find out how at the DAK's July 11 luncheon.

Work 11 **New Art at the AMOA** 33

by Nancy Blue
You read many a story in the local press about what's happening to workers who got the ax. How much thought is being given to those who didn't lose their jobs and have to take up the slack? Are you one of the "working wounded?"

The Austin Museum of Art presents Aaron Parazette and Ken Price: Material Morph. The show opens July 21 downtown.

Over the Hedge 12

by Tom Spencer
Gardeners with a penchant for filling up their yards with plants might want to think about adding a vertical element in the form of lovely, fragrant, flowering vines. Here are some to try.

Peaceful Children

"In the special environment prepared...in our schools, the children themselves found a sentence that expresses the inner need: 'Help me to do it by myself!'"

—Maria Montessori
The Secret of Childhood

Donna Bryant Goertz believes in learning something in great depth before you go spreading it around and she has held herself to that high standard. She waited more than three decades to publish her conclusions about educating young children. She founded the Austin Montessori School in 1967 in an old Army barracks on the St. Edward's University campus, starting with a single classroom of seventeen children between the ages of three and six. Today the school has an enrollment of nearly three hundred students ranging from toddlers to middle-schoolers, plus a waiting list of seventy more two- and three-year-olds. Austin Montessori School is one of the two dozen Montessori schools in the Austin area, and one of three certified by Association Montessori Internationale, the organization founded in 1929 by Dr. Maria Montessori, Italy's first female physician and the founder of the Montessori school movement. From Maria Montessori's first class in 1907, her unorthodox methods of educating children have spread throughout the world.

To the average parent who is familiar only with traditional education—in which

Mallory Foley, age five, attends Austin Montessori School.

Donna Goertz and the Policy of Inclusion

by Ken Martin

Photography by Barton Wilder Custom Images

the teacher teaches a mandated curriculum through lectures, assignments, and homework; learning is measured by grading assignments, administering tests, and monitoring behavior; and rewards and punishment are doled out by the teacher or principal—the philosophy and methods of education employed by Austin Montessori School, and other Montessori schools like it, seem nothing less than revolutionary. How could it be that children could educate themselves, aided by a teacher who's not even called a teacher but a guide?

The answer, according to Association Montessori Internationale, is that Montessori classrooms provide a prepared environment in which children are free to respond to their natural tendency to work. The children's innate passion for learning is encouraged by giving them opportunities to engage in spontaneous, purposeful activities with the guidance of a trained adult. Through their work, the children develop concentration and joyful self-discipline. Within a framework of order, the children progress at their own pace and rhythm, according to their individual capabilities.

Beyond following these basic tenets of Montessori education, Goertz steadfastly refuses to allow Austin Montessori School students to be medicated, labeled or excluded. The media is full of stories about the impact of Ritalin, a drug often prescribed for so-called hyperactive children. Numerous books have been published about the drug. *Time* magazine ran a cover story, "The Age of Ritalin," back in November 1998. But how many schools actually forbid students to take it? How many schools discourage the practice of tagging children with diagnoses like learning disabled, dyslexic, ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder), ADD (Attention Deficit Disorder), or even ODD (Oppositional Defiance Disorder)? How many teachers will welcome a child who repeatedly wets her pants, a boy who never sits down or stands still, or a boy whose chief activity is arguing, manipulating, and disrupting the work of others? At Austin Montessori School, such children are seen not as burdens but as gifts that will benefit all the students by providing lessons in coping and group problem solving.

Last month Goertz, sixty-one years of age, completed her thirty-fifth and last year of classroom teaching. The results of running this living laboratory for all these years are distilled in her recently published book, *Children Who Are Not Yet Peaceful: Preventing Exclusion in the Early Elementary Classroom*.

The bulk of the book is taken up with nineteen brief anecdotal chapters, each focusing on one or two children who in nearly any other classroom would be labeled troublesome or worse. You don't get to the bottom line of her conclusions until reaching the chapter titled "Rethinking Education," which takes up the last eight pages of the book. But what a gutsy conclusion it is: traditional education can only harm our children.

"In traditional learning environments, most children like school in the first grade. Half of children like school in the second grade. Most children dislike school in the third grade," Goertz writes. "When we take all this into consideration, it is not surprising that our children are cruel to one another, form groups of insiders and groups of outsiders, and gradually become dehumanized and distorted enough to erupt into violence during their adolescence, when the pressure heats up and their hormones hit the boiling point. We have created a thirteen-year assembly line of violence, and the confounding fact is that our product is so often faulty. Our children do not erupt into violence nearly as often as they should, considering our design and manufacture of their learning environments."

Goertz argues that in the name of trying to prepare chil-

dren for adult roles, society has devised and imposed on them an educational system to which not all children can adapt. The system is at odds with the nature of children, she says, and too much of children's energy is spent coping. The result: They become distorted, cruel, and take their misery out on one another.

"Traditional education is simply no longer an option if we are to prevent the undercurrents of violence in our schools that more and more often erupts in killing," she writes. In a nation reeling from news stories that keep



Sam Minot and mother, Marian Schwartz.

cropping up about young students in city after city going on killing sprees, Goertz's message ought to strike a chord. While everyone from academics to journalists to the United States Secret Service has studied the school shootings, no one has come up with a root cause or devised comprehensive preventive measures. Goertz, on the other hand, has not studied these incidents but concludes from being with children and watching them for many decades, "It's just so obvious." The key to preventing violence, according to Goertz, is never letting a child believe there's anything wrong with him, no matter how bizarre the behavior, and never allowing a child to be excluded.

"When you look at that little child and what he just did, and you go, 'What's the matter with you?' inside your head, but you don't say it, because you know there's nothing the matter with him and you don't even want him to think there's something the matter with him, because that's not going to get you anywhere. You know he's off track and you've got to get him back on track. And...being on track is not being under my control because then I'm not controlling him, then he's going to do whatever anyway. It means getting him to get himself entirely back to his true nature.

"If you call him a liar or say 'You're stealing' or 'You're a bad boy,' that just pushes him further," Goertz says.

It sounds as if Goertz is asking for Montessori guides to be nearly superhuman in resisting the impulse to say these sorts of things to children who misbehave. On the contrary, she says. "Cornering a child and causing him to lie over and over—and you know he's going to do it—and then calling him a liar, that's exhausting," she says. "It's hard to step out of it just because of habit, but it's

much less exhausting to practice stepping out of it because that feels good. Fighting with someone doesn't feel good. Once you build a community of staff members to help do that, it becomes easier, too."

Children are taught good manners and given ways to mediate disputes among themselves. The adult guide does not take sides but instead offers ways for children to express their anger toward one another without calling each other names or assigning guilt. No punishments are meted out. These practices are made possible through the slow and patient building of a community of students who have adopted a culture of harmony and mutual respect.

Students in early elementary grades one through three are grouped together in a class of twenty-eight to thirty-five and will stay in the same classroom with the same guide for three years. Each year, a third of these students will move to grade four and join an upper elementary class with fifth and sixth graders and a new guide with whom they will spend another three years, also in a class of twenty-eight to thirty-five. At Austin Montessori School, the same kind of grouping will carry through middle school, grades seven and eight.

By most school standards, classes this size would seem large, perhaps too large to handle. Many private schools, for example, take pride in having few students per class. In the traditional, me-teacher, you-student style of education, small classes would be of benefit. But the Montessori method literally demands large classes. Goertz says most children of elementary school age are collaborative learners who want to select their learning projects and find others who will join in. As Association Montessori Internationale puts it, "In a research style of learning, elementary children work in small groups on a variety of projects which spark the imagination and engage the intellect.

Lessons given by a trained Montessori teacher direct the children toward activities which help them to develop reasoning abilities and learn the arts of life."

Turning the notion of traditional education on its head, an overriding goal of the Montessori method is to insist on large classes "to make sure the adult does not have the ability to control the children," Goertz says, "to make it impossible for the adult to teach all the children. If they're not self-educating, they're not going to learn, because there are too many of them. So that's what you want...That way, she has to do her job right. Because it's so easy to fall back into teaching the way we were taught. It's just so easy." A subtle indication that the guide is not some authoritarian figure lies in the fact that students call the guides by their first names.

The key to success in the Austin Montessori School classroom is developing the community of students. Goertz says, "The way we keep people from marginalizing themselves or being marginalized by others is when the children develop that sort of community they feel a power that's really satisfying to them. They need to be in great numbers so that they feel they are very powerful, and the teacher is their great ally, their great advisor, the one who draws the

lines of the limits."

In Austin Montessori School, students with eccentricities or who sometimes exhibit bizarre behavior are accommodated in the faith that, sooner or later, they will present a key that the observant guide can use to unlock an appropriate solution. Sometimes this takes years. Instead of blaming the child, the guide has to take responsibility. "It's not the child, it's your job," Goertz says. "Children are what they are. They're all different varieties. And you take on the responsibility and you share it with the parents. The parents have to also be working really hard."

Parents of children in Austin Montessori School get a steady stream of advice, says Caroline Foley, mother of daughters Meaghan and Malory, ages nine and five, respectively, and son James, who will be two next month. All attend Austin Montessori School, as do two grandsons by her husband's first marriage, Nolan, eight, and Brogan, five. If the school ever needed an enthusiastic, high-energy cheerleader, Foley would easily win the job. Foley is an unabashed fan of Austin Montessori School, flatly declaring, "It's changed our lives."

Meaghan had suffered from low self-esteem, which Foley says she had recognized and worked on by praising Meaghan's accomplishments, but with limited success. When Austin Montessori School spotted the problem, tools were offered to transform the girl's apparent need for outside affirmation into a realization of worth from within. Goertz explains that the best kind of self-esteem is that which children "assign themselves because they feel so good, because they stretch themselves to help other people that they don't necessarily get along with usually, or help other people learn who don't learn the same way they do, that kind of self-esteem that grows from within, not that adults like to give children: 'Oh that's good. What a good boy or good girl.'"

"That was a quick eye-opener for me that they could spot these things and give me advice on how to alter them," Foley says. "So throughout primary, we were sent home literature weekly." Some of the advice was hard to accept, like limiting "screen time," meaning television, movies, and computers, to just two hours a week. "What's harmful in Bambi?" was Foley's initial reaction. "But we realized through Donna's talk that what they're not doing while they're watching television is more important than what they're watching."

"They're not conversing with you. They're not working on any skills. They're not helping you prepare dinner. They're most likely not folding socks from the laundry basket. And they're not thinking. They're not creating."

Goertz says, "This is right at the heart of Montessori. Every child is born with the drive for self-education. Every child is interested in all subjects. Every child has concentration and follow through. But this gets broken down and it starts really early to be broken down." The drive to learn is stunted not only by television and computers but by well-meaning adults who stride into the room of a playing



Jared Wright working on math at Austin Montessori School.



Kristina Kopriva, violin teacher, Jamie Howard and Yates Phillips at Austin Montessori School.



Natalie Tsai and Nikki Kaplowitz at Austin Montessori School.

toddler to shower affection. "We say 'Oh how's my little cutie pie?'" and we interrupt and break concentration," she says. "Every time the baby is dragged around on a bunch of errands when it's time for this little being to be carrying large objects around or moving these particular muscles or discriminating sensorially in this particular way, we're breaking down what nature has put there."

Children who arrive in Austin Montessori School's toddler or primary programs find special attention. "We take the children in at three and help them restore and revive all their natural drives to learn," Goertz says. By the time they reach early elementary level for the first grade, they're better prepared. They have been taught manners and given a culture of learning. Foley has been amazed to find her not-yet-two-year-old son straining to reach the kitchen sink to put away his dishes after breakfast and navigating restaurant etiquette with ease, things she didn't teach. Her older children pack their own lunches, eat healthy food, and recycle and compost at school.

Some parents find all this a bit much. Foley was one who found it a cold shock when she learned Austin Montessori School's primary care program, which runs for three hours each morning, was not open year round. "I said, 'What do you expect me to do with these kids? It's summer and I've got to work.' And it just forced me to slow down and create memories, live the summer," Foley says. Otherwise, she says, "I would not have come up for air, just work, work, work, work."

In the end, Foley says what she learned from Austin Montessori School about how to raise her children helped to change her own life as well. She was self-employed and describes herself as a workaholic. "I learned to eat sitting down. I'd never done that in my life. I learned to put away the cell phone," she says. Eventually she gave up the design and installation segment of the landscape firm she ran with her husband, Jim. "It cost me a million dollars a year to get a life," she says, with hardly a trace of regret. "If my son wants to go outside, I go outside. Before, with my daughter, I didn't go there. A year ago it would be with a mobile phone in one pocket, the cordless phone in the other pocket, and paperwork on a clipboard. Now I can just go outside and sit in a chair."

Marian Schwartz raised two sons who each spent eight years in Austin Montessori School, both graduating from the middle-school program. The eldest, John Minot, will be a senior at Lyndon Baines Johnson High School this fall, where younger brother Sam Minot will be a sophomore. Both are enrolled in LBJ's Magnet Science Academy Program.

Schwartz, a Harvard graduate whose profession is to translate from Russian works of literature, history, economics, philosophy, and fine arts, describes her experience in discovering the Montessori system as haphazard. Like many parents, she and her husband did no research. They live in Travis Heights and initially selected Casa Montessori for convenience. Since that school did not offer

FoodWorks INTERNATIONAL

- Hands-on Recreational Classes
- Week-Long Culinary Culture Tours to Puerto Vallarta in November.

Visit www.f-foodworks.org where you can register for classes.



Contact us at 619-3916.

The restaurant Austin is proud to call its own — presenting variations on a theme of classic coastal and interior Mexican cuisine. You're invited to make reservations soon and see why *Fonda San Miguel* has been called the best Mexican restaurant in the country.

FONDA SAN MIGUEL
www.fondasanmiguel.com
2310 West North Loop Blvd. • Houston, TX
Reservations requested
(512) 459-4121
Open Monday-Saturday, 1:30 closing
Sunday (Brunch Buffet) 11:00-2:00
Catering also available.

Experience lyrical Mexican cuisine in Austin's most beautiful setting.

Feng Shui Supplies

- 14 KT Gold Jewelry
- Mineral Specimens
- Sea Shell Boxes
- Crystal Prisms
- Fossils
- Fountains
- Sterling Silver Rings
- Rainbow Maker Mobiles
- And Much More



CRYSTAL WORKS®
12TH & LAMAR
472-5597

elementary education, John later transferred to Austin Montessori School.

Schwartz describes John as a "born intellectual" who was simply beyond the realm of what public schools could do for him. "When he was four, he said to me, 'Mom, I know what an adult is: An adult is someone who knows what happened yesterday.' Which is exactly true. Little kids have a terrible time with time. It causes enormous frustration and insecurity." By the third grade, John had his own opinion about the purpose of academic tests, Schwartz says: "A test is where they ask questions and try to trick you." John studied both Latin and German at Austin Montessori School, and at LBJ took up the study of Japanese. This year he won state competition for mastery of Japanese, called the Japan Bowl, and recently left for Japan on a six-week Youth for Understanding program, paid for courtesy of a full scholarship. Could John have achieved these things in a traditional school? Schwartz thinks not. "He would have been in the principal's office all the time, because he would not have been able to shut up," she says. "He was too eccentric for regular school. You would never see that now."

"Sam, you could have dropped him anywhere, in anyplace, from the day he was born and he would have been okay, but I think he might not have been if he hadn't gone to Montessori." Schwartz says that Sam is an exceptionally kind child who was appreciated for that at Austin Montessori School but might not have been in a rougher setting.

Both John and Sam Minot are doing the toughest work available in Austin's public high schools, yet at Austin Montessori School they never even had homework, Schwartz says. None. "You learn it while you're there," she says. "You do it. You learn it. Nobody has to tell you that you're going to learn it. You just learn it." Only in middle school, where her sons learned to write major reports, did they explore academic pursuits outside the classroom, Schwartz says. "John did it extra, out of school," she says. "Sam managed to finish it all at school," she adds, chuckling because John probably did a more comprehensive job, even insisting on using the vast library resources of the University of Texas at Austin for some of his research.

So what's it like for a child who is thrust out of the nest of Austin Montessori School to fly in high school with this kind of background? "For my kids, especially John, the worst part of the transition is they are unaccustomed to being bored," Schwartz says.

Schwartz is not willing to say that a child can't get a good education in a traditional setting. "I think you can have a great school that's not a Montessori school if you've got a great teacher," she says, adding, "there are plenty of bad Montessori schools that are accredited. They just have bad teachers."

While Schwartz says her sons entered LBJ High far ahead academically, occasionally they would run into areas of knowledge which they hadn't covered at Austin Montessori School. The method of learning they had mastered, however, provided the path to a solution. "When they come up against a situation they don't immediately know how to solve, one of their first impulses is not to go to an adult," she says. That's because at Austin Montessori School, the adult would turn the situation around and ask the student

what he thinks should be done. As a result, Schwartz says, students "learn the habit of saying, 'Okay, here's the situation. Here's what I know. What do I need to know?' They gather in as much as they know, find what they don't know, and find solutions."

What about the violence of public schools? Even a magnet school has a student body made up of high achievers in the magnet program and others who are not quite so motivated.

Claire Hoverman attended Austin Montessori School through the sixth grade before enrolling in Kealing Junior High School's Liberal Arts Magnet Program. Next she went to the Liberal Arts Acad-



Donna Bryant Goertz, founder and director of Austin Montessori School.

emy at A.S. Johnston High School. Hoverman says there were disturbances in these public schools. "I saw violence and I guess you kind of get used to it," Hoverman says. "I think you just learn to walk away from it, instead of running to it as some people do."

Hoverman, now nineteen, will be a sophomore this fall at the private Swarthmore College, near Philadelphia. A member of Swarthmore's soccer and track team, Hoverman is double majoring in art history and biology and is a pre-med student, with long-range plans to follow in the footsteps of her parents, both of whom are doctors. This month she will be leaving for Eldoret, Kenya, Africa, where for six weeks she will work alongside medical students in a children's hospital.

Looking back on her years at Austin Montessori School, Hoverman says what she got out of it was "a sense of independence." She says Austin Montessori School also creates a community. "I think you find your own academic niche through the academic portion and you also figure out how to fit in with everybody else, because you work with people and whatever it is you pick for the day."

Hoverman recalls being proud of the fact that among her friends in the Girl Scouts, all of whom attended Casis Elementary in West Austin, she was the first to learn to write in cursive, and the first to learn to read.

Chris Churney, who joined the Austin Montessori School staff this year after running a Montessori school in Canada for years, says Montessori teaches cursive writing

before it teaches how to print individual letters of the alphabet, because the motor skills of young children are better suited to it. "It's easier to flow than to start and stop with each letter," he says.

Hoverman says one of her brothers who attended Austin Montessori School for three years suffered from Attention Deficit Disorder, but the guide was able to calm him and help him not only to learn but to find it enjoyable. He recently graduated from Columbia, majoring in architecture.

Asked how it is that the environment created by Austin Montessori School permits children to educate themselves, Hoverman says, "I think kids are able to choose what they want to learn. But it's not as if the teachers are not a part of the everyday activities. They're sitting right there. They check up on the kids to see what they're doing, to see if they're doing it correctly, to see if they're doing a variety of things and not just focusing on one subject."

"I think if you're interested in something you actually put an effort into understanding it. Something just finally clicks and you're understanding the concept that's in front of you," she says. "I think that's really rewarding, rather than (working) at something and being continually frustrated with what you're trying to learn. Oftentimes in public schools, I think it's hard when teachers use grades or something to measure a student's ability when there's other things they could look at." Goertz says, "The teacher in traditional classrooms is put in the position of playing up the grades and playing up the good behavior—at the expense of children who can't yet pull it off."

How does a child who never had homework, never had tests, and never got grades adapt when thrust into a traditional school setting that has all these things?

"I was nervous about the work I was going to have to do," Hoverman says of the Kealing magnet program, where for admission she had to go through an acceptance process. She was also nervous about not having the same teacher all day, in fact having to switch classes for each period. But it turned out okay. "I didn't have any problems with it," she says. "I think I almost wanted homework." After laughing about the concept of wanting homework, Hoverman added, "It was like a new experience. 'Oh, homework, okay, let's see what this is like.'"

Hoverman has nothing but praise for Donna Goertz, who was her teacher in early elementary school, and for Donald Goertz, Donna's husband, who taught Hoverman in upper elementary and who now leads the middle school. "They both helped me a lot," she says, "I think my confidence especially. I think that's a big thing for me, to be able

to go to a public school and be able to survive the teaching in high school...Just be yourself is what they taught a lot, and I think I've been able to do that throughout my life and they had a huge part in that."

Clearly the faculty, parents and students at Austin Montessori School are proud of what's been achieved. But this kind of education doesn't come cheaply. It must be paid for out of parents' pockets, in addition to the school taxes that are collected based on one's real estate values.

An academic year contract for the toddlers' three-hour-daily program runs \$4,000. Elementary programs run \$5,000 a year for those who enter from Austin Montessori School's primary program, \$5,400 for others. Middle school costs \$5,600 a year. Payment plans are available for an additional fee.

Marian Schwartz says, "It's kind of a standard joke around here, as soon as people's kids leave, they buy a new car. Instead of a car payment (they're paying tuition). Everybody's driving an old car, and people make sacrifices." On the other hand, she says, "I thought the tuition was incredibly reasonable." Further, she says the school works with parents who hit financial snags.

While the goal of Austin Montessori School is to provide high-quality education, it's anything but choosy about the students it accepts. "We don't select children—we never even see the children," Donna Goertz says. "We don't want to select children. We select parents. We select parents that we think understand what we're all about, because that's what works the best." As to the child, she says, "We could have whatever learning style, whatever learning rate, whatever behavior."

The exception to that is that once an elementary community of students is established, only a limited number of unprepared children may be allowed to join. "If we're going to a child who's never had the foundation, it's not that we're elitist, it's that it would be a disservice if we took in very many of those children," Goertz says. "So we can take in one or two or three and they will just kind of catch the wave and go with it."

Chris Charney, who will be a middle-school guide in the fall, says that tuition is relatively affordable, compared with other private schools, and the school is open to most all students, factors that weighed heavily in the decision for him and his wife to take positions at the school. They had looked at a lot of Montessori schools in this country before pulling up roots in Canada. "A couple we looked at were tempting because they offered high salaries, but were prep schools," he says. "They bring in specialists to help students score higher on the SAT (Scholastic Aptitude Test) and they focus more on academics. This school has a very big focus on emotional intelligence and community building."

Goertz says, "What we do is start with diversity, with recognizing different learning styles and rates, of always expecting the best in what they can give at that moment in the way of behavior and learning. But that's different for every child. And that's the only way they can all thrive. And children are so astute at recognizing one another's needs as soon as they are in an environment with an adult who knows that."

"What they do is shut down all their potential for emotional intelligence if they're with a teacher who is not emotionally intelligent. They just shut it all down. They don't develop that potential. But if they're with a teacher

who's trained to be emotionally intelligent, and to recognize learning styles and rates, it's almost like an instinct. It's intuitive to them. And they never ask, 'Why can't he do that and I can?' Or, 'If I have to do that, why doesn't



Clockwise from top right, James Foley, Malory Foley, Brogran Foley, Meaghan Foley and Nolan Foley, all students at Austin Montessori School.

she?" They never ask that. They just know that they're all different."

Goertz, born in Laredo and educated there in public schools, graduated from Villa Maria High School, a Catholic girls'-school that she recalls as a "wonderful terrible place." She then attended Seion School of Nursing, the University of Texas, and St. Edward's University, all in Austin, but gained no degrees. She had never baby-sat and

she says, "I was never fond of children." Not till she had her own, that is. Further, she had no interest in teaching. She heard about Montessori soon after starting a family. In the early nineteen-sixties, Goertz read library books about Montessori, ordered Montessori materials, and began teaching her children at home. Soon she was trading Montessori instruction in return for Suzuki violin lessons for her children, overseeing nine children in her self-taught way. In 1982, Goertz took formal Montessori training in Bergamo, Italy, receiving an elementary diploma from *Fondazione Centro Internazionale Studi Montessoriani*. She later founded *Educateurs sans Frontiers*, a select group of twenty-six experienced Montessorians from sixteen countries.

Although Goertz says her own children did not benefit so much from Montessori because they were growing up ahead of the school itself, all five are educating her grandchildren in Montessori schools in Austin, Dallas and Houston.

Why has Goertz waited so long to spread the wisdom she's acquired? "When you're learning

how to do something new, that new and that different, that requires that you rethink everything you've ever thought about human beings, not just about children, you don't want to just spread it as far as you can," she says. "Because when you do that, you aren't learning the depth of it as well as you should be learning it, and you may be just in certain ways spreading misunderstandings."

Many potentially good programs fall by the wayside in public schools for that very reason, she contends. "In the independent school districts, they cycle through fads, because no one learns it deeply enough and practices it long enough before they spread it all over to every school," Goertz says.

At root, to Goertz, education is about raising children to achieve the best things they can with whatever native intelligence and talent they were blessed. "You get this little genetic package, this template, and it is what it is, and you're not going to change it. But it can play out in so many different ways. The positive potential of that little package is just as great as the negative potential. That's where the environment comes in. That's where the nurture comes in. The better we understand and discipline ourselves to accepting this nature and supporting this particular individual, the more they'll be able to not be what we want them to be, but to be the positive manifestation of that little genetic package. That's what I think about. You put many children in a traditional school and you're not going to get the positive manifestation of that little package, because it's not going to play out that way."

But don't look for Donna Goertz to be on the ramps trying to reform traditional education. She's said her piece in her book, and will leave the politicking to others.

"It's always felt just fine to me to be a tiny little school that does a deep new work with few children and parents," she says. "Because this is as much about the parents and families as it is about the classrooms and the children in the classrooms. So it's important for us to not try to take over the education of the United States." ■

Ken Martin, editor of The Good Life, was educated in Dallas public schools, where in elementary school he often got his butt paddled by the principal. He survived and graduated at age forty-two from the University of Texas at Austin.

Montessori Resources

Austin Montessori School is spread over three campuses, with its main office at 5006 Sunset Trail, adjacent to Sunset Valley Elementary School. Phone (512) 892-0253, send e-mail to info@austinmontessori.org or visit www.austinmontessori.org.

Austin Montessori School is one of three schools in this area (the others are Casa Montessori Child Development Centers Inc. and Tierra Vista Montessori School Inc.) certified by Association Montessori Internationale (AMI), which was founded by Dr. Maria Montessori. For more on AMI, visit www.montessori-ami.org. AMI is headquartered in Amsterdam, The Netherlands.

In addition, AMI/USA, based in Rochester, New York, may be contacted at (716) 461-5920 or by e-mail at ami-usa@montessori-ami.org.

Also affiliated with AMI is the International Centre for Montessori Studies Foundation in Bergamo, Italy. Visit www.montessoriberghamo.it.

Another Montessori organization is the American Montessori Society, based in New York, New York. For more on that organization, call (212) 358-1250 or visit www.amshq.org.

According to the Yellow Pages, the Greater Austin area has some two dozen Montessori schools. For more about the other local schools, let your fingers do the walking.

Children Who Are Not Yet Peaceful: Preventing Exclusion in the Early Elementary Classroom by Donna Bryant Goertz was published by Frog Ltd. in Berkeley, California, and distributed by North Atlantic Books of Berkeley. The book is available locally at BookPeople. ■

—Ken Martin