

# Millbrook Community Preschool at Grace Church celebrates renovation



Students and instructors at Millbrook Community Preschool at Grace Church are celebrating the school's 10th anniversary and a top-down renovation.

Last year the preschool, which was founded by Dr. Diane Schnoor, became the beneficiary of an anonymous donation for the refurbishment. This came on the heels of substantial expansion and renewal of the school's outdoor playground space in 2016.

Work began in the autumn of 2016 with the recessing of pipe work and removal of a partition wall. Early in the project, the school designated Community Playthings, manufacturers of premier children's furniture and play equipment, to outfit the new space.

The company, which builds all equipment to order in Esopus, uses only local, sustainably sourced maple wood.

School officials were amazed with the furniture. Not only was it beautiful, and thoughtfully designed, but ethically produced, said Maureen Sarma, former director and current teacher.

She said that after touring the factory floor, the staff was thrilled to learn that the only byproduct of the manufacturing process was food-grade vinegar. It promised the cleanest possible environment for play. Architectural plans were submitted to the company's room designer, and after months of consultation on how to optimize joyful, spontaneous learning opportunities,

Students at Millbrook Community Preschool at Grace Church are involved in a variety of learning activities involving the newly acquired furniture. The school recently received an anonymous donation for the refurbishment, coinciding with its 10th anniversary. *Photos by Glynis Carpenter*

a vision was agreed.

The aesthetic is one of clean lines and open spaces. Terrariums built by the children and leafy plants line the window ledges. Individual cubbies for each student shine in the cloakroom. The library beckons with an audio listening cube big enough for children to climb into for a story. A room-scaped kitchen is one of the new design highlights of the sensory and dramatic play room.

In addition, a fleet of new tricycles are busy burning up the floor of the theater area on the top floor. Wool carpets accent the floors and original artwork ornaments the walls. A fully loaded art studio now meets the scope of the children's imagination with space to experiment with every conceivable medium, from clay to liquid watercolor.

The construction play area has oversized interlocking blocks for building in the best way - big.

"I love the new blocks" said Aaron Rochfort, 5. "You can stand on them, and

build rocket ships, and get inside them."

Program director Deborah Coconis said the space now fully reflects the philosophy that the school holds dear, that children learn best through exploration and intuitive, self directed play. She explains this approach with reference to creating art.

"It's about seeing the hand of the student in the work. There is no prescribed outcome. We engage them in creative expression through process before product," she said.

The school is now experiencing its busiest enrollment season in recent years. To visit the new space, contact the director, Deborah Coconis, at (845) 677-5325, or email her at [deborahatgrace@gmail.com](mailto:deborahatgrace@gmail.com).

The preschool will host an Open House on Saturday, March 10, from 3 to 5 p.m. Those who want to attend should RSVP to the above information. The school is at 3328 Franklin Avenue in the Village of Millbrook. A scholarship program is available.



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### Answers to this week's diversions (puzzles on page 18)

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**SUDOKU**  
This week's answer

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8	6	7	5	9	4	3	2	1
1	2	9	3	8	7	6	5	4