

# COMMUNITY MONTESSORI SCHOOL

## THE HISTORY OF CMS

By Elizabeth Rouse Fielder

As Told By Mrs. Janet Ashby, Administrator, CMS

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"Community Montessori School (CMS) was established in 1970," Mrs. Ashby says brightly, matter-of-factly, with brown eyes flashing. She sits erect in her spare, but well-appointed office, full of energy, pride, wisdom and sheer joy. Today, Mrs. Ashby is the very essence and soul of CMS. She has been a vital part of CMS since its inception.

The beginning...

Mrs. Ashby explains,

"We started with a group of families who were driving to Georgetown every school day so that their 5-year-olds could go to Montessori school. Elizabeth Heiman Farrar [currently a Junior Level teacher at CMS] was teaching at Cardone in Georgetown, Kentucky. That group of families decided they wanted to have a Montessori school here in Lexington. They asked Ms. Farrar if she would teach if they started a Montessori school in Lexington. They advertised publicly for the first meeting. 150 people came to that first meeting. I attended because I was interested in Montessori for my son. With that many people present, I was concerned that my son may not get into it. I stood up and asked what I would have to do to get my son into the Montessori school."

The room fills with her laughter and sparkling eyes as she remembers that first fateful meeting. Little did she know then that CMS would become her life for the next 30 years and hopefully for many more years.

Janet Ashby becomes Administrator...

"That first year, they chose parents for their skills and balanced the needs with the classroom sizes."

Janet and her husband Bob Ashby were chosen "because Bob built every table in that school." In fact, Mrs. Ashby notes, some of the classroom tables in use at CMS today were built by Bob Ashby 30 years ago. During the first 6 years, from 1970 to 1976, CMS held classes in the Second Presbyterian Church building on West Main Street in Lexington. In the beginning, Mrs. Ashby answered phones, prepared snacks for the classroom and helped with other similar tasks. Ms. Nancy Howard was the first Administrator. Nancy Howard was an Association Montessori Internationale (AMI) teacher. Mrs. Ashby was an Assistant to the Montessori teachers. As Mrs. Ashby puts it,

"At some point, Nancy and I realized that I should be the Administrator, because I was the one making the decisions."

As CMS grew, Mrs. Ashby's job grew.

Growth of CMS forces relocation...

Jo Ann Stickler was one of the original Montessori teachers at CMS. She taught the second Primary Level class (for children ages 3 to 6). Then, CMS hired two new Montessori teachers: Cindy Wilson and Leslie Shane, who had received their Montessori training in Miami, Florida. According to Mrs. Ashby, by this time, CMS consisted of two Primary Level classes and one Junior Level class (for children ages 6 to 9 and 9 to 12). Then, Elizabeth Farrar went to Bergamo, Italy to receive her training to become a Junior Level teacher. Bergamo was the only place that Junior Level instruction was offered at the time.

"In June of 1976, we had to leave the Second Presbyterian Church building. We formed a Building Committee made up of Mr. Jock Gum, President of the CMS Board; Mrs. Janet Ashby, Administrator; Mr. and Mrs. Gordon Garner; Tom and Becky Lewis; Linda Crowe; and David Mossbrook. Within 3 months, we had hired our architects, Mr. Thomas Fielder and Mr. Day Johnston, and had bought this property."

CMS is located off Crestwood Drive in Lexington. The CMS Building Committee went to the approximately 90 families, the parents of the students and said, 'You will each have to sign a one thousand dollar (\$1,000) note.'" They did, and CMS was able to obtain a \$150,000 loan for the school. Mrs. Ashby looks straight into your eyes, smiles and says reflectively, "That's how we financed it." She pauses, remembering the strength of that early commitment.

(Click to view larger photo)

166 Crestwood Drive...

"It took 3 months to build the new CMS building at 166 Crestwood Drive, with the families painting the walls and installing the floor tiles. [Architects] Tom [Fielder] and Day [Johnston] helped the families with most of the work."

Amazingly, they did it! The community of CMS families had united and built a new school building in just 3 months, in time for school to start in the fall of 1976. Mrs. Ashby pauses reflectively again.

"When it came time to start, we did not have a building permit. Jock Gum held a meeting and told the parents and cried when he told them, but the parents didn't care. We had to use people's basements until we got the building permit. We got it within two weeks."

Mrs. Ashby looks steadily into your eyes to emphasize the community of effort and trust that the CMS families had built along with the building. That sense of community continues to this day, embracing the students, staff and parents.

"Initially, the neighbors did not want the school and protested its presence, but now the neighbors feel good about CMS," she adds, smiling. CMS has continued to grow since the

completion of the building in 1976. In 1978, an addition was built for the office now occupied energetically by Mrs. Ashby, and an extra classroom. In 1984, Jock's Gymnasium was started and completed by 1985. In 1998, additions and expansions were made to two classrooms. The future includes big plans for more building.

New building considerations...

"We will be having a major fund drive for a new school building on this site. Its size and location will depend on state regulations and the ages of the children who will be attending. Right now, we have students attending through the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grades with the Montessori Middle School of Kentucky (MMSK)."

Mrs. Ashby intends to visit other Montessori schools in the United States in the near future to examine their facilities, acquire the names of their architects and designers, and determine the working elements needed for the future new CMS building, which might combine CMS and MMSK, if so desired by the Board and parents.

Mrs. Ashby credits parent-run Board...

Mrs. Ashby credits the CMS Board for the school's success:

"CMS has always had a parent-run Board. This is one, if not the only one, parent-run Board that works. Usually the parents will try to come in and dictate what teachers do in the classroom, but not here. It is very clearly defined what the parents do, what the Board does and what the CMS staff does. The function of the CMS Board is to make policy decisions, business operations decisions, but not to set the curriculum or to run the classrooms."

It works. She smiles.

A teacher's assistant knocks on Mrs. Ashby's office door and enters with a young child in her arms. An issue has arisen that requires Mrs. Ashby's special touch. She knows exactly how to handle this particular child in a firm, loving and educational way. She knows exactly how to lead CMS, its staff, Board, parents and, most importantly, its children and students, into the future.