

# COMPOST

The Parent Community Organization newsletter of Imagine Environmental Charter School **SEPTEMBER 2008** Vol. 1, Issue 1

## Letter from Principal Jon McCann

I would like to extend a sincere thank you to all community members, volunteers, staff and students for helping in the successful launch of the Environmental Charter School. Our grand opening celebration was a wonderful event and a fitting culmination of two years of preparation and planning. The hard work, extra effort and overwhelming commitment of many individuals resulted in the creation of a unique school serving a population of fantastic families.

Thank you!

With the opening behind us, we now enter a new and exciting stage

of our development. Committed to providing a unique and outstanding educational experience for our students, our faculty plans and executes instructional best practices that provide measured academic growth. As a starting point in the data-gathering process, each grade level



See McCann, page 2

## Stepping back to admire the view: A brief history of the PCO

BY KATE LUCE ANGELL

When PCO secretary Marla Ferency and after school program director Kristan Abeshouse look around the school today, they say they're amazed at how far it's come since the charter was approved in February.

At that time, ECS was little more than a vacant building, a visionary Board, and committed Parent/Community Task Force members like Marla and Kristan.

"We've come a long way in only seven months," said Marla. "I've had so many 'pinch me' moments," added Kristan. Both have Kindergartners in Ms. Raimondo's class.

But ECS history goes back farther, to spring 2006, when Board president Barbara Hicks started discussing with friends the possibility of founding a school in the Regent Square Elementary building, which closed in 2004.

Along with co-founders David Lassman and Mike Schiller, Ms. Hicks recruited the 12-person board, as well as bringing in Phil Parr, a former chief of staff for Pittsburgh Public Schools



who acts as Imagine Schools' regional developer.

In March 2006, both Marla and Kristan signed up as Parent/Community Task Force volunteers at a meeting held to gauge community interest in an environmentally themed charter school.

In the following months, Task Force members collected hundreds of signatures on petitions, wrote letters to Pittsburgh school board members and posted flyers.

Kristan said she never doubted the school would become a reality, but that there were some bumps in the road. The school's application for a charter was denied by the

Pittsburgh Public Schools' review board in January 2007.

The review board's biggest concern was that ECS had no prepared environmental curriculum. Kristan said when Green Woods, a successful environmentally themed charter school in Philadelphia, offered to share theirs, "that was the missing piece."

But getting the charter was only the beginning of another set of challenges.

Although in good shape overall, the building had water damage and had to be brought up to code and furnished. A staff had

See PCO, page 4

# Events Calendar

Get out and get active...

## Saturday, September 27

Quiet Creek Herb Farm  
Tyke Hike

Join us for a tour of this farm and learn about sustainable living. Children (0-8) will do a hands-on activity, eat a healthy snack and wander through the farm's lush gardens of organic vegetables and edible flowers. Visit [ventureoutdoors.org](http://ventureoutdoors.org) or [www.quietcreekherbfarm.com](http://www.quietcreekherbfarm.com). Pre-registration required. \$8.00 per family.

## October 2

Free Admission Day at  
Phipps Conservatory

No admission fee to visit our Gardens and see the Chocolate exhibit. [www.phipps.conservatory.org](http://www.phipps.conservatory.org)

## October 4

Community Bike Ride

This fall, kick off Pittsburgh Celebrates 250 with The PNC Legacy Trail Ride. The ride will finish in Point State Park when families are encouraged to bike the last leg of The PNC Legacy Relay and The VO 250 Bike Tour, from the Hot Metal Bridge or PNC Firstside Center to Point State Park. The ride will conclude with a concert, featuring Joe Grushecky and the Houserockers, Etta Cox, B.E. Taylor and the MCG Jazz, as well as the region's largest ever fireworks display launched from the downtown skyscrapers and involving all three rivers, presented by the Colcom Foundation. Register at [www.bike250.org](http://www.bike250.org)

## October 11

Harvest Wine  
and Cheese Hike

Join us as we take a 3 mile hike on the hilly terrain around Emmerling Park and along part of the Rachel Carson Trail. We will take in the autumn colors, and afterward enjoy a repast of bread,

wine, and some of the best cheeses in the world! Visit [www.ventureoutdoors.org](http://www.ventureoutdoors.org) for more information.

## October 12, 1-4 PM

Black Sheep Puppet  
Festival at the Pittsburgh  
Children's Museum

Puppet-making workshop and performance with puppeteers from the Black Sheep Puppet Festival, currently in its 10th year in Pittsburgh and the longest running yearly puppet festival in the country.

Learn more about the festival at [www.blacksheepuppet.com](http://www.blacksheepuppet.com)

## October 18, 9 AM-NOON

Urban EcoSteward  
Native Seed Collection

Always popular, join native plant specialist Kathy McGregor to learn how to collect and store native seeds at the Frick Environmental Center. Space is limited so please register with Jeff by 10/15 at [jeff@ninemilerun.org](mailto:jeff@ninemilerun.org) or by calling (412) 371-8779, ext. 14.

COMING OCTOBER 17,  
DON'T MISS OUR

# Fall Festival!

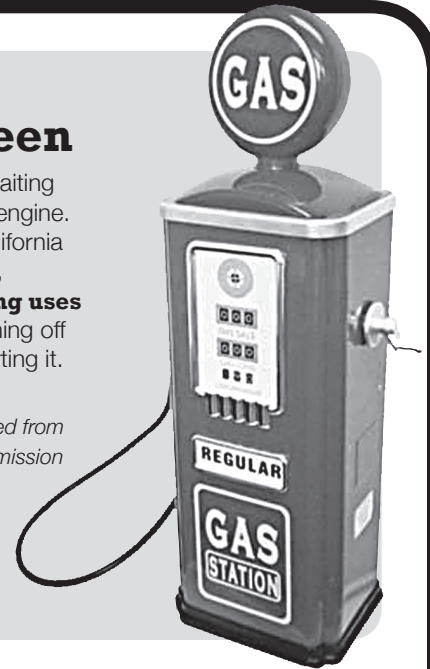
Join us October 17 from  
6 to 8 PM for the event  
of the season, the FALL  
FESTIVAL! Bob for  
apples, take a flashlight  
walk through Frick Park,  
participate in a recycled  
costume parade, and  
much much more.

Save the date and more details will follow. Volunteers should email [angell@ecspco.com](mailto:angell@ecspco.com).

## It's easy being green

If you find yourself waiting in a car, turn off the engine. According to the California Energy Commission, **10 seconds of idling uses more fuel** than turning off an engine and restarting it.

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## McCann, from page 1

initiated baseline testing in the first few weeks of school. With additional teacher observations and discussions with students and parents, student Individual Success Plans will be in the early stages of development in the coming weeks.

Our environmental curriculum began this week, as students jumped into the study of our first unit, "All Living Things," in the Environmental Science room (affectionately called "The Treehouse," by staff, students and community). Some students ventured into the park, searching for living and non-living things, honing their observation skills and recording their findings in their "Look Here Journal." Others explored the definition of environment, and are crafting collages to help explain the connections between our community and nature. Please forgive us if your child comes home with new insight into the flora and fauna of Frick Park! In the coming weeks, watch as our school hallways and common areas begin to grow as we showcase our environmental theme.

School-wide, students are connecting reading, writing, and math curricula into our environmental theme. Some classes have written poems about their natural surroundings using their five senses, building science observation skills along the way. Other students are hard at work studying informational text about our environment. Our vision to provide a truly integrated program of environmental studies will continue to develop as the year progresses.

Beginning Monday, September 15, grade level teams will take over Morning Meeting presentations. First grade has offered to present first, and in the forum of the whole school, first grade students will showcase some of the environmentally-integrated work that they have created in their classrooms. It will be exciting to see the children present artifacts of their learning to our school community.

Thank you for your continued support and commitment to ECS. We look forward to an exciting fall term with each of your students!

# You are here.

You are part of an exciting and innovative school that relies on community and parent contributions to create an inspiring atmosphere for our children.

While all contributions to ECS have incredible value, comPOST will feature exclusive **ACT NOW** highlights of both Volunteer Opportunities and Item Donations Needed. Please take time to read the Parent Involvement and Resources page and to review current lists of every need (and every wish!) we have at [www.environmentalcharterschool.org](http://www.environmentalcharterschool.org).

## ACT NOW DONATION OPPORTUNITIES

October's five "most unusual" items on our staff's wish list:

- 1) Used colored rubber bands and pens that don't work  
(e-mail Kathryn.Hoel@imagineschools.com)
- 2) 22 clipboards  
(e-mail Jennifer.Schwartz@imagineschools.com)
- 3) 3-D mind-bender puzzles  
(e-mail Joe.Burke@imagineschools.com)
- 4) Disposable cameras  
(e-mail Melanie.Cowherd@imagineschools.com)
- 5) A headphone splitter  
(e-mail Danielle.Meyer@imagineschools.com)  
(e-mail Jennifer.Schwartz@imagineschools.com)

If you cannot be unusual this month, you can be an everyday hero by donating one of the items that our staff wishes for and uses every single day. Items requested include: prizes for great classroom behavior in all grades, paper, card stock, chalk, markers, paints, maps and globes, pencil sharpeners and pillows. A complete list and contact information can be found at [www.environmentalcharterschool.org](http://www.environmentalcharterschool.org).

## ACT NOW VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES



- Help hungry learners in the cafeteria during one lunch period each week  
(e-mail [parentinvolvement@espco.org](mailto:parentinvolvement@espco.org))
- Spend time skipping on the playground during one recess period each week  
(e-mail [parentinvolvement@espco.org](mailto:parentinvolvement@espco.org))
- Work one shift at the Scholastic Book Fair  
(e-mail: Beth Lott at [bookfair@ecspco.org](mailto:bookfair@ecspco.org))



- Assist in the library with book maintenance or class-time help for two shifts a week  
(e-mail [library@ecspco.org](mailto:library@ecspco.org))
- Contribute your professional skills each week by volunteering on one of the PCO committees  
(e-mail the PCO at [parents@ecspco.org](mailto:parents@ecspco.org))



- Help plan the Fall Festival  
(e-mail Angel Lehrian at [angell@ecspco.org](mailto:angell@ecspco.org))
- Help deliver a winning sports program to our young athletes  
(e-mail the PCO at [parents@ecspco.org](mailto:parents@ecspco.org))

## How to succeed in fundraising without really trying.

### Boxtops for Education®

You can clip 10¢ Box Tops coupons from hundreds of your favorite products such as Cheerios®, Betty Crocker®, Juicy Juice®, Ziploc®, Kleenex®, Hefty® and more! Just clip and send them in to your child's teacher or deposit them in the designated box in the auditorium. Visit <http://www.boxtops4education.com> for more information on how you can earn bonus box tops for the Imagine Environmental Charter School.

### Campbell's Labels for Education™

Labels for Education™ makes it easy for you to give back to the Imagine Environmental Charter School. And now it's even easier to get free merchandise, with over 150 of your favorite foods worth 5 points each!

Chances are, you already have many products in your kitchen right now that qualify for the Campbell's Labels for Education program —

Campbell's® soup, Prego® pasta sauce, Pepperidge Farm® Goldfish® crackers, or V8® beverages just to name a few.

After you enjoy them, don't forget to save the proofs of purchase! Look for the Labels for Education logo on the label, near the UPC. Just clip and send them in to your child's teacher or deposit them in the designated box in the auditorium. Visit <http://www.labelsforeducation.com> for more information.

### Giant Eagle Apples for the Students

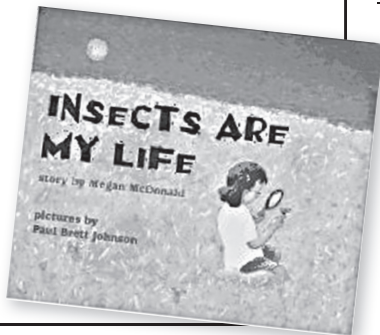
The easiest way to enroll is by phone and it only takes about 30 seconds. Call 1-800-474-4777, enter your Advantage Card # and our school ID# 5605. You may register online at [www.gianteagle.com](http://www.gianteagle.com). You must use your Advantage Card when you shop for our school to receive credit.

## Kathy Hoel's Library Pick

Each month, school librarian Kathy Hoel will recommend a book relevant to the curriculum at ECS. This month:

### ***Insects are My Life*** by Megan McDonald

This book was recommended to our library by Frick Environmental Center Nature Camp's Lydia Konecky. It is a wonderful story about a girl named Amanda Frankenstein who collects, protects, and imitates bugs' behaviors. This book complements the Environmental Charter School's first nine week's Big Unit theme: All Living Things: A Study of the Local Living World. We think that your child will enjoy this book that was written for Kindergarteners through Third graders. If you are the parent of a Kindergartener, your student can also tell you what they have learned in school about the tiniest 'critters.'



### **Green Tip:** **Remember the Bag**

The reusable bag is a shopping must-have. Be prepared for spur-of-the-moment sprees by storing extra canvas or hemp bags in your bike basket, office cubicle, and the trunk of your car.

## Get Fresh: A seasonal recipe from John Lash

John Lash is a classically-trained chef, previously employed at Oakmont Country Club and Eleven, a fine-dining restaurant in the Strip District. His goal for The Environmental Charter School's lunch program is to create a menu revolving around local, organic, sustainable, nutritious, and fun-to-eat foods. The following recipe is a quick and easy use of zucchini, which is readily available in our gardens, co-ops, and markets. It is light, healthy, and fun to cook and eat.

### **ZUCCHINI TOSTADAS** **ingredients:**

3 Tbsp canola oil

2 Tbsp olive oil

4 8-inch flour tortillas

2 medium-sized zucchini, thinly sliced

1 cup salsa

Salt & pepper, to taste

4 cups sharp cheddar cheese, grated

### **directions:**

**1.** Preheat broiler on high. Place oven rack as close as possible.

**2.** With pastry brush, lightly brush canola oil on both sides of tortillas.

**3.** Broil tortillas on both sides until lightly golden. Let cool.

**4.** Heat oven to 450° degrees.

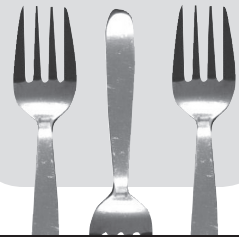
**5.** In a non-stick skillet, saute zucchini in olive oil until tender. Add salsa, heating throughout. Add salt and pepper, to taste. Transfer to bowl and set aside.

**6.** Place crisped tortillas on baking sheet. Spread some zucchini/salsa mixture on top, top with grated cheddar. Bake for 5 minutes, until the cheese melts and begins to bubble.

**7.** Serve on a bed of iceberg lettuce.

### **Going green in the lunchroom**

In order to prevent waste, we would like to recommend, whenever possible, that students who are packing their lunch bring metal silverware (not your finest!) and a cloth napkin. Thank you!



### **PCO, from page 1**

to be interviewed, hired and trained. A thousand decisions had to be made about scheduling and procedures.

And in the almost two years between the first meeting and the granting of the charter, many Task Force members had moved on and enrolled their children in other schools.

"We had to reinvigorate the group, which meant starting almost from the beginning with recruiting people," Marla said.

Volunteer sign-up sheets at summer events like the Ice Cream Social brought in members to the newly renamed Parent Community Organization, and about ten

of the most active became the Interim Executive Committee.

Marla explained that because decisions impacting the beginning of the year had to be made very quickly, the Interim Committee couldn't include every volunteer.

"We had to keep it a manageable size to get things moving," she said, but added that starting with the first PCO meeting September 25, "we're hoping others will step up and take over."

Parents don't need to join the PCO, she pointed out. "Everyone with a child at the school is already a member."

Meanwhile, principal Jon McCann and curriculum coordinator Kristen Priganc came on board, and Kristan

said despite the hard work, "they just smiled through the whole thing."

Jon worked so many late nights, she added, that they joked about getting him a cot so he could sleep at the school.

Now that school's in session, Kristan said every parent, volunteer and staff member should take a step back. "We need to celebrate all our accomplishments."

She also stressed that this first year was the "big year or patience."

"We have to remember we're laying the groundwork for a legacy. Hopefully our kids will look back and say, 'I was in the very first class and look where I am now.'"

# 5 QUESTIONS

Get to know an ECS community member better through 5 inane questions...this month, **Nikole Brugnoli Sheaffer, Environmental Specialist**

## 1. What is the weirdest thing you've ever eaten?

I love dandelions –root and all. They are a delicacy in my house! My grandfather would go and “dig” for them in the spring right after the last frost and first few warm days. If we were lucky to have a few warm days in December, he would head to the farm fields to “dig” for them for our holiday meal. My dad has since taken over the tradition and there is still a fight for the bowl at the table. (There was an incident of ordering



“insalata misto” in Italy that had absolutely nothing to do with salad, but I didn’t actually ingest any of the tentacle-covered critters that arrived at

our table, so I don’t think that counts.)

## 2. What music gets you dancing in the kitchen when no one’s looking?

Music is always playing in our house. I love it all –from opera to Motown to 80s classics. I happen to like to dance around the kitchen to anything by Cake or the Temptations (my daughter, Ellason, thinks my routines are fantastic). I jam out in my car to the Afghan Whigs, Better Than Ezra, Wilco, Guster, and embarrassingly, Angels and Airwaves, Fall Out Boy and, yes, Taylor Swift and Carrie Underwood. I sing along to the soundtracks of Sunset Boulevard, Guys and Dolls and anything with Ethel Merman as a lead. Luckily, my daughter thinks I’m ready for Broadway.

## 3. Who would play you in a movie about your life?

Tina Fey. Well, actually, it would probably be Liz Lemon, her character on *30 Rock*.

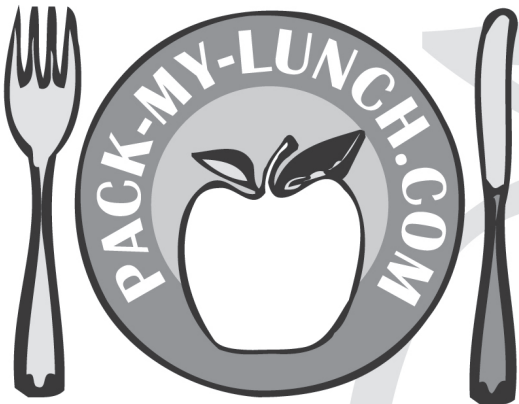
## 4. What’s your favorite spot in Frick Park?

Spot? Well, I really like the Gatehouse on the Tranquil Trail. It shows the beauty of something man made against the backdrop of a natural setting.

## 5. What’s the most notable recycled or re-purposed item in your home?

We salvaged the old wooden mailboxes from the corn flake factory my grandmother worked at in Irwin, PA. After some refinishing work, they are the perfect receptacle for our out of control CD collection.

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- shop for local food
- provide nutritionally correct portions for your child’s age
- make 3 entrees and 6 side dishes for your child to choose from each day and
- accommodate gluten-free and vegetarian diets

**PCO**  
**contact info:**  
parents@ecspco.org

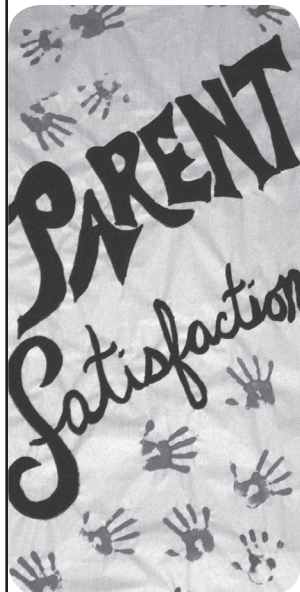
## Our mission

*The mission of the Parent Community Organization is: to represent the views and concerns of parents to the school administration and staff; to serve the greater Pittsburgh community and to maintain a positive presence therein by being a model and advocate of sound environmental practice; to engage in innovative and effective fundraising and development activities; and to enhance the educational experience and personal growth of students, teachers, and families.*



## Imagine excellence

The Six Measures of Excellence are the yardsticks we use to evaluate our effectiveness in providing a challenging, effective program of study and strong moral development in a safe, nurturing environment. We grade ourselves annually on how we are performing - where we are excelling and where we can improve. The Six Measures of Excellence are:



**Shared Values** of integrity, justice, and fun allow every teacher, student, and parent associated with Imagine Schools to unite around common themes that guide our collective behavior.

**Parent Choice and Satisfaction** are the most reliable indicators of the quality of our schools.

**Academic Achievement** balances instruction in reading, math, science, social studies, and the arts, and is measured by student learning gains as well as proficiency.

**Positive Character Development** in our schools

is a high priority. We strive for growth in students' character measured by positive changes in behavior and world view.

**Economic Sustainability** means every school in our family is financially able to stand on its own, which is the best indicator of that school's ability to continue educating children over the long term.

**New School Development** enhances our ability to reach more children, more families, and more communities. As we increase our family of schools, more opportunities abound for Imagine Schools' educators to grow professionally as well.

## Book Fair Safari

**Mark your calendar to attend our First Annual ECS Scholastic and Barefoot Books Book Fair!**



**Monday, October 13–Friday, October 17**

Many wonderful books and fun items for all age groups will be available at convenient shopping times. In addition to providing us with an opportunity to generate excitement and a love of literature, one half of Book Fair profits goes right to our school library. Visit: <http://bookfairs.scholastic.com/bookfairs/cptoolkit/publish/environmentalcharterschool> and <http://janetgreenley.mybarefootbooks.com/>

The PCO is organizing many special events that will coincide with the Book Fair—so plan to be a part of an exciting week!

## Advertise in comPOST

Reach every family attending Imagine Environmental Charter School in addition to individuals from our many Partner Organizations and a broad range of community support groups.

### Insertion Fees:

1/8 pg (3 5/8" w x 2 3/8" h) .....	\$15
1/4 pg (3 5/8" w x 4 7/8" h) .....	\$24
1/2 pg (7 1/2" w x 4 7/8" h) .....	\$42
full pg (7 1/2" w x 10" h) .....	\$80

### Deadlines:

All materials are due the 5th of each month for publication in the next month's newsletter.

### Submission Guides:

Preferred ad format: high-resolution, press-optimized PDF file. Acceptable formats: InDesign, Quark, Adobe Photoshop and Illustrator. For a small fee, we will design your ad!

**Send inquiries/files to:** newsletter@ecspco.org.