

Classroom activities are very hands-on and follow the lead of the child, as in Montessori teaching methods, Holmes said. As in inquiry-based programs, children at Harmony are encouraged to delve deeper than in traditional studies.

"We want children to question what's happening, rather than the teacher just being the lecturer," Holmes said.

And Waldorf methods are incorporated through the integration of the arts in a variety of subjects.

"I love all three of those philosophies, but I didn't love any all on its own," Holmes said.

Currently, the school's multi-age classrooms are comprised of two preschool – kindergarten classes, with a third planned for the 2009 – 2010 school year, and one first- through third-grade class. At one point in the school's history, a fourth- through sixth-grade program existed, but it was discontinued. Holmes hopes to increase enrollment enough to once again offer an upper elementary class.

Parents such as Christine Blake are hoping for the expansion as well.

Blake, along with her husband, Patrick, and sons Thomas, 5, and Sam, 4, moved to Forest Acres from New York a year ago.

"We fell in love about five minutes after we entered the building," Blake said. "The main thing for us was really the emphasis on letting the kid be a whole child, to let them explore and figure it out. They encourage creativity and imagination."

Leroy said she sees Holmes' philosophies, especially a commitment to community service, reflected in the students.

"They are just thoughtful children," she said. "I really think it's the influence of the school. It's just wonderful."

Serving others

Even the youngest students at Harmony are encouraged to serve others. By kindergarten, students are engaged in one field trip each week, often giving back to the community by visiting with nursing home residents or planting flowers at Habitat for Humanity homes. Each Friday, students are allowed to purchase a cookie for 25 cents, as a fund-

Want to know more?

For more information about Harmony School, visit www.harmonyschoolsc.com. Community partners are needed to provide service opportunities for students. Contact the school for details.



Delaney Leroy started at Harmony School in kindergarten.

raiser for nonprofit organizations around the world.

"The group of kids decides where they will send that money each month," Leroy said.

Past recipients include Doctors Without Borders and Heifer International.

"It's not a lot, but that's still \$50 that Doctors Without Borders didn't have," she said. "The children all see that the money adds up. Several children have had birthday parties and asked people to bring money to donate instead of gifts."

The children embrace service because they are taught that their help makes a difference, according to Holmes.

"We take them into the community," she said. "They actually go out to help the community. We are a family-oriented school that believes in helping others. We try to instill that in our children."

That value extends outdoors as well. The school is located on property that has seen other lives as a radio station, a hair salon and a public building owned

by the city. The area provides natural surroundings and plenty of green space for gardening and other outdoor activities. Deer and turtles are frequent visitors, much to the delight of students.

"Initially, this was the old Timmerman School," Holmes said. "It sat empty for about 10 years. Even though it looked kind of dumpy at first, we saw the vision. We fixed it up gradually, with the help of parents."

Teacher-parent work days help take care of painting, repairs and construction projects, which keeps tuition relatively low. The school also accepts ABC child-care vouchers from families who qualify.

Blake, a nutritionist and assistant professor of public health at the University of South Carolina, said she also appreciates the school's commitment to teaching children about health and modeling it through daily life.

"I think it's rare to find a place that walks the walk and talks the talk as far as children's health," she said.

Blake recalled a school party that included small cupcakes and cookies, but more prominently featured a vegetable tray and fruit. For students at Harmony

School, that was just part of a normal meal.

"It helps with my boys, because fruits and vegetables are just part of the day," she said.

Students also stay mentally and physically busy.

"They spend time outside and they do a lot of activity," Blake said. "They move a lot. They aren't skittish about the cold. They just say, 'Send mittens,' and they go outside."

Beyond the teaching methods and holistic approach, Blake and Leroy agreed that Holmes is the school's compass, setting the direction and tone for the students.

"She never seems rattled," Blake said. "She is the coolest, calmest person."

Leroy said parents even enjoy morning drop-off time, when they can get a few moments of Holmes' influence — the true harmony of the school.

"Parents like to go in in the morning to get a little dose of Debbie," she said. *