



Teaching a love of learning

When learning is “child-initiated and teacher-framed,” children develop a lifelong fascination with the world around them and a love of discovering new things. That’s certainly the philosophy behind **ChildRoots NW** (1740 NW Flanders; 503-225-1151; childroots.com), the latest learning center to, well, put down roots in the Pearl District.

The arts-and-science-based center, which opened in April, welcomes children ages 6 weeks to 6 years. The 9,000-square-foot facility boasts nine classrooms with space for 110 children, labs and an outdoor play area. Previously home to KinderCare, the building has been reconfigured to fit owner Christina Unga’s educational approach.

“We are teaching children how to care for the world,” says Unga, who operates four other ChildRoots centers in Northeast and Southeast Portland. Sustainability and learning about the environment take center stage, with organic meals and snacks, locally-sourced foods, cloth diapers and non-toxic wooden toys.

Students start in groups of eight, staying together with the same two teachers as they grow. Rooms are built to be modular and transformable, based on classroom needs. “Tables become bigger, toys become more complex,” Unga explains. Infant and toddler rooms have a six-month age range; preschool then combines ages 3 through 5, putting 16-20 kids in a classroom with two teachers.

In every room, “we are building learners, based on their interests,” Unga says. “We are teaching children how to enjoy learning throughout their lifetimes.”

Children pose a lot of questions about the world around them, she says. To help them, teachers get planning time each day without the children, as well as access to a resource librarian. “Kids put you on the spot,” says Unga. “Teachers must find the answers.”

— Jennifer L. Hanson

NEWS & NOTES

- **Lift Urban Portland** (formerly Northwest Portland Ministries) holds its annual food drive in May to benefit low-income families living in the Pearl and nearby Northwest neighborhoods. Nonperishables — dry or shelf-stable milk, peanut butter, canned items and cooking oil are among the most-wanted items — can be donated throughout the Pearl. Look for food barrels in the atrium of The Ecotrust Building (721 NW Ninth); at Powell’s City of Books (1005 W Burnside and 40 NW 10th); at Umpqua Bank (1139 NW Lovejoy); at The Wyatt (1221 NW Marshall); at REI (1405 NW Johnson); at Portland Closet Company (1220 NW 14th); and at Legacy Good Samaritan Medical Center (1015 NW 22nd).

- With a nod to its 105-year history, **The Mark Spencer Hotel** (409 SW 11th; 503-224-3293) — which began its life as The Nortonia — has unveiled an expanded, state-of-the-art conference center with enough room — 2,500 square feet — for 200 guests. At its heart: the Nortonia Ballroom, which can be divided into two rooms and arranged as a theater, classroom, banquet hall and more. Before January, “our largest room would have held 60 people,” says Dave Spacek, director of sales and marketing. “We can now support bigger corporate meetings, banquets, you name it.”



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