

## ***Country Day School of Arlington, 1959 -1999***

### **A Brief History**

In the spring of 1959, in a small house on the corner of Collins and Andrews street in North Arlington, a pre-school through first grade school was started – Arlington Country Day School. Modeled after the country day school movement of the late 1800's, the school's founders, Gerald and Elizabeth Fagerstrom, believed that providing children with the opportunity to learn not just by sitting at their desks in the classroom but rather by doing, getting actively involved in the pursuit of knowledge, was the most effective way to approach education.

The following fall, the school relocated to the north end of its present location on Roosevelt Street. What followed over the ensuing decades was nothing short of remarkable. The new site offered five plus acres of woods, streams, fields and a pond for the program's development and the students' enrichment. With the new campus came increased enrollment as well as the wonderful addition of all types of animals including ducks, chickens, rabbits, goats, pigs, and even a horse named Cocoa.

Over time, as the school's reputation grew and spread, families looking for a simultaneously challenging and engaging setting for their children enrolled in increasing numbers until the school grew in 1975 to 350 half and full day students. With the growth came the expansion in grade levels through the sixth grade and the acquisition of a neighboring property which more than doubled the size of the campus.

In 1965, a new gymnasium was built in honor of Dr. and Mrs. W.H. Fagerstrom. In 1984, a high school program began. In 1986 what is now the school's main building was erected.

In 1991, after 32 years, the school's founders, Elizabeth and Gerry Fagerstrom, retired and the school entered its second phase of growth and evolution under the leadership of Donna and Val Wilkie. Donna Wilkie joined the school as its Headmistress, having been the Director of Development at Fort Worth Country Day. Her husband Val, having been a Headmaster himself for twenty years brought a great deal of wisdom to the school during his wife's tenure.

As was the case throughout the region, the school was adversely affected by the economic downturn of the late 80's. Enrollment declined, and the school reduced the range of its program to include only pre-school through sixth grade. Under Mrs. Wilkie's leadership, the school converted to a 501(c)3, established itself as the Country Day School of Arlington, and began to regain its former stature through increased enrollment, the addition of a middle school, the construction of a new K-1 building, and the creation of an intricate collection of walkways spanning and connecting the expansive campus. Mrs. Wilkie went on to oversee the accreditation of the school by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS), a critical step in affirming the school's stature as one of the preeminent non-sectarian schools in Tarrant County.

As a formidable team, the Wilkies raised hundreds of thousands of dollars to meet the CDSA's funding needs through their work with organizations such as the Bass Foundation, the Scott Foundation, the Amon Carter Foundation, and the Rainwater Charitable Trust. Upon Mrs. Wilkie's retirement, the school honored her and her husband by having a gala dinner for over 200 attendees, and established the Donna and Val Wilkie Scholarship Fund as a way of continuing the Wilkies' commitment to ensuring that the school be accessible and affordable.

CDSA's third Headmaster, Nicholas Stoneman, brought to the school extensive experience both as a teacher and as a Headmaster. His charge was to further develop the school's presence in

the community and in so doing enhance the academic program. Under the leadership of Mr. Stoneman, the school reviewed and enhanced its K-8 curriculum, expanded its elective and athletic offerings, added a variety of new program initiatives throughout the grades, and opened two new centers on campus.

The multi-use Wilkie Science Center, which opened in 2003, houses two laboratories, a butterfly garden, a greenhouse, Nikon microscopes, a saltwater aquarium, and an herbarium. All CDSA students, preschool through 8<sup>th</sup> grade, enjoy regular explorations in the science center. Another recent addition to the campus is CDSA's Leadership and Outdoor Education Center, named in honor of Mr. Stoneman. The Center includes thirteen low elements and five high elements of a challenge course. Both of these Centers serve the educational and leadership needs of CDSA students and other organizations in the Arlington community.

The school's current Headmaster, Steven Gende, arrived at CDSA in the summer of 2004. Mr. Gende's vast experience in education and leadership, as well as his culturally diverse background, lends to CDSA the expertise to develop an extensive strategic plan that will carry the school into its next phase.

As we look to the future, the school aspires to sustain its founding goal of "learning by doing" through the continued growth and development of a distinct program that blends the skill of its faculty with the natural attributes of its unique setting.