

**CONTACT US**  
 Erick Bengel | Weekend Editor  
 ebengel@dailyastorian.com

# WEEKEND BREAK

**FOLLOW US**  
 facebook.com/  
 DailyAstorian

## SALMONBERRY HILL

**HYBRID SCHOOL BASED IN ASTORIA  
CELEBRATES A FULL FIRST YEAR**



## Curriculum focuses on creativity, student-centered learning

By **HEATHER DOUGLAS**  
 For EO Media Group

**A**STORIA — This month, Salmonberry Hill, a school in rural Astoria for kids ages 3 to 11 that blends homeschool and public school, completed its first year in operation.

Inside the Netel Grange in Lewis & Clark, the “Salmonberry Scholars” — children ages 7 to 11 — gather scripts for “A Midsummer Night’s Dream.” Children chatter excitedly, forming a loose circle, and begin reciting lines that incorporate some of Shakespeare’s verse.

The students chose the play from the selection of stories offered to them. Last year, they chose one based on Greek mythology. The kids are involved in everything from costumes to sets.

They have even created a new character named “Luck” — Puck’s twin brother. Puck and Luck — played by 8-year-olds Sahalie Heavenrich and Solice Swank, respectively — sit side by side and rehearse.

Spinning and twirling during recess, a group of other students choreograph a fairy dance.

Corrine Alaine Garrison, the hybrid school’s founder and head teacher, had wanted to start a school like Salmonberry since she was a child herself.

“Salmonberry is a happy medium for many families because homeschooling can be a huge job,” she said.

The upstairs houses Salmonberry Hill Academy for grades 1 through 5, led by Garrison and associate teacher Andrea Burch. Downstairs, Salmonberry Play School serves 3-year-olds through kindergartners and is co-taught by Bree Heavenrich and Courtney Johnston.

### ‘This is it’

Salmonberry Hill — which focuses heavily on arts, music and nature — started as a homeschool formed by Jasmine and Shannon Swank. The couple, from John Day, wanted a different option for their daughter, Solice. A community of families, led by Garrison and Heavenrich, came together.

“I had not seen the type of school I



**ABOVE:** Gus Lawrence, left, and Vaughan Eccles, right, paint pictures during art class at the Salmonberry Academy near Warrenton. **TOP:** Jayden Woody, left, and Annabelle Hawkins, right, share a laugh while playing with Legos and other toys during classes at the Salmonberry Academy near Warrenton.

wanted in my community, so we went to check out the grange. I knew instantly: “This is it. We can transform this and make it into what we’re wanting,” Heavenrich said. “We deep cleaned, re-painted, took out enormous amounts of trash, replaced windows to get the space ready.”

Teachers at Salmonberry are “unrestricted in their ability to meet the child where they’re at,” Jasmine Swank said. “My own daughter’s confidence has grown exponentially, which has been incredible. There is a lot of hands-on learning, art and creativity, which can be lacking at more traditional schools.”

The play school devotes an hour of outdoor time each day — rain or shine — and gives students daylong access to an art room.

The older students’ curriculum includes

a traditional combination of history, math, science and writing, with frequent opportunities for creative expression, including the performing arts. Each month, the scholars memorize and recite a poem, and each year the school performs a play.

### The arts

While Salmonberry Play School hosted its own art show for parents earlier this month, the older kids are preparing one for their own pieces in early June. They worked with water color, acrylic, collage, mixed media and clay.

Sarah Lippold, a parent and regular visiting guest art teacher, saved the students’ work all year for the show.

In keeping with the curriculum’s art focus, “we will usually read then write about a famous figure and finally draw that

famous person,” Lippold said.

Exposure to musical art forms is common at the school; local musicians such as John Fenton, and Lulu and Ned Heavenrich, volunteer to play for the kids.

John Fenton, a Knappa marimba teacher, brought 10 marimbas and set them up for the Salmonberry Scholars and, in about 40 minutes, had taught them a few songs: “They were amazing,” he said. “The little ones from the play school served as the audience.”

Lulu Heavenrich, a retired teacher of 30 years, has grandchildren at Salmonberry and visits several times a week. She and her husband, Ned Heavenrich, of the Brownsmead Flats, bring in instruments, and teach folk dances, games and country dancing.

### Values

While the two schools are quite different, the values are the same: an emphasis on student choice, student-centered learning and creativity.

“The curriculum is not dictated by the state or government, but by the children,” Garrison said. “I assess the students during the summers, and from there I choose the curriculum that best meets my students. I focus on an individualized pace with topics that interest the children.

“We are really big into history, so we write and practice our grammar through history and science. We also create art centered around famous historical figures we study. We just finished a big unit on Vikings.”

Garrison and Heavenrich believe that a focus on arts benefits children’s social-emotional development.

“Art opens a window in the mind,” Garrison said, “and when you integrate different academic subjects, even math, it helps to visualize things to understand them better.”

“By encouraging kids to do art, we understand other people better and, ultimately, the world,” she said.

For now, the Salmonberry Scholars are busy memorizing lines and creating flower wreaths in anticipation of their upcoming performance.

“We’ve come full circle and had a lot of support from the community,” Heavenrich said. “We’ve had an incredible first year.”

Photos by Colin Murphey/The Daily Astorian