



Madeline, Christine, May, Jim, Gretchen, and Grady Lonergan (L-R)

SPRING VALLEY Montessori Academy



Christine Lonergan with young learners.

• sponsor spotlight •

With the whirl of a CD, the boombox slowly turns on, and the students all jump to their feet, wiggle their little fingers toward the sky, and begin to clap to the joyful beat. In an instant, colorful dresses start swirling, feet begin stomping, and the students gleefully sing the school anthem, “We are Spring Valley Kids.” The joyful children are united by the rhythm of the music, Mrs. Lonergan’s silly dance moves, and the uncontrollable laughter as the other teachers join in the fun. Christine Lonergan, the Director of Spring Valley Montessori Academy (SVMA), radiates infectious happiness as she sculpts her students into confident, compassionate, and hopeful leaders. This begins a typical morning at SVMA.

As the youngest of three children, Christine Lonergan grew up on a farm near Galesburg, Illinois, where she enjoyed riding horses, helping with morning chores, and showing hogs at annual 4-H Fairs. Her mother, Suzanne Block, was a teacher and her father, John Block, ran the family farm. Christine never believed she would leave her rural roots, but before her freshman year at Denison University, President Ronald Reagan appointed her father the Secretary of Agriculture. During college breaks, Christine gradually unpacked her belongings into her new DC home and worked as an intern at the Potomac School and as a camp counselor at Beauvoir. After receiving her BA in psychology and

officially moving to the big city, she recognized that the NW neighborhoods of DC offered their own small-town communities.

Inspired by her mother, Christine earned her masters in education from George Washington University. Shortly after graduating from GW, Christine met her future husband, Jim Lonergan, a native Long Islander. As they made their own mark on DC, Christine and Jim married and purchased their first home in the Palisades, right down the street from her parents. Christine continued to pursue her love of teaching and taught second grade at Hyde Elementary School. Her first years of teaching offered much enlightenment, as she discovered creative ways to instill the love of learning in her students. Christine transferred to Francis Scott Key Elementary School, a school closer to home, where she became an award-winning DC Public School teacher for fifteen years.

Since Christine and Jim love children, they feel fortunate to have four of their own: Madeline (25), Gretchen (23), May (18), and Grady (15). While researching preschool options for her youngest, Grady, Christine discovered an “increased need for preschools in the area.” After ten years running her own summer camp, Busy Bee Camp, Christine felt inspired to build on her experiences and make a career move that would benefit local families.

A graduate of United Montessori Academy, Christine opened the doors to SVMA in the fall of 2005. The school originated in the Spring Valley and American University Park neighborhoods but moved to its current location at 5144 Massachusetts Avenue in response to enrollment growth.

The award-winning program combines the Montessori method with creative learning and a play-based approach. SVMA’s emphasis on fos-

tering the child’s independence and confidence is embodied in the school’s philosophy: “Live, Love, Laugh, Learn.” The cheerful Tulip (two-year-olds), Daisy (three-year-olds), and Sunflower (four- to five-year-olds) classrooms are designed to encourage a child’s innate interests and introduce the joys of learning through stimulating and enriching materials. Families are provided with two-, three- and five-day options and daily lesson plans incorporate six interrelated areas: practical life, sensorial, language, mathematics, social studies, and science. Each morning, children take a break and exercise in the multipurpose space and on the enclosed playground and garden. In an effort to extend the typical 9 a.m. to noon hours, SVMA also offers Lunch Bunch and afternoon enrichment courses in music, art, cooking, gardening, Spanish, and yoga.

The Academy’s 1:5 student to teacher ratio allows students ages two to five to receive individualized attention with a variety of small, large, and mixed age learning. Current SVMA parent and mother of three Kristen Billings shares one of her family’s most valued aspects of the Academy: “Our family loves the fact that SVMA is an intimate enough preschool setting where the teachers know everybody by name—whether they are in their class or not!”

Mrs. Lonergan has created an institution that provides her students with an outstanding academic experience during their most formative years. Former SVMA mother Courtney Chase describes Christine Lonergan as having “that special, genuine vision where learning along with social development creates a warm environment where children thrive.” The opened red doors and welcoming atmosphere of Spring Valley Montessori Academy continue to attract many Spring Valley, American University Park, Palisades, and Bethesda families.

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