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Washington Parent Celebrates 3 A’s for April: Advocacy, Awareness & Advancement

Started in 1970, April 22nd marks the 45th anniversary of countless coordinated efforts to demonstrate support for environmental protection. At the risk of revealing my age, I can still vividly recall that first Earth Day in 1970 at Parkside Elementary School – now Parkside – Montgomery Parks Headquarters in Silver Spring. I was in the 5th Grade when our science teacher, Mrs. Sharon Beisher wrote a play depicting the future of our environment if we were to continue down our perilous path of pollution. And although I have forgotten the exact name of my fictional character, I proudly remember being cast as a prominent business owner, whose factory was polluting our waterways. (The memory of being a young girl playing a powerful man has never been lost.)

The play was a spirited adaptation of Charles Dickens’ “A Christmas Carol” where I fell asleep behind my desk and was visited by 3 spirits: The first spirit showed me what our land looked like before I began dumping all my factory’s chemicals into the rivers and streams, the second spirit told me what our earth had become with my polluting practices and the third spirit warned me what the future would hold if I continued to contaminate our waterways. I remember the third spirit as sort of a Maleficent look-a-like (minus the horns) who just stood there in her dark cape and covered face pointing at me and coughing. I, of course, awoke to see the error of my ways and at once began to eliminate my factory’s damaging defilement.

If you don’t remember that first Earth Day but would like to continue in its tradition of awareness and advocacy, then read about the Potomac Conservancy on p. 22 to learn all that they are doing and how you and your family can help to save our “nation’s river.” Get ideas from “Make a Date to Dig” on p. 20 and cultivate more than just plants with your children. You might even want to catch the star-studded Global Citizen Earth Day Concert on the National Mall, highlighted in our monthly Short Stuff column on p. 14 or create some of Crunchy Scott’s Earth Day crafts on p. 27.

Whether you have pets or are pondering adding one to your family, you must check out our interview on p. 16 with Dr. Katy Nelson, aka “Dr. Pawz” – a local TV and WTOP radio pet advocate. She gives some great tips on not only choosing the perfect pet for your family, but measures to take to keep your pet healthy when the warm weather (finally) arrives.

Besides celebrating our planet this April, it is also Autism Awareness Month. Read about the broad spectrum of autism, and the most recent progress made to develop more effective screening and diagnostics, in “Putting the Pieces Together: Early Interventions for Autism” on p. 46.

This month there is definitely something for parents with kids of all ages. If you have a little one, discover advances in research on how napping leads to increased learning in “Stand Up For Naps” on p. 34. Maybe you have a teen who is almost ready to drive or has just begun the journey: You won’t want to miss “Steering A Path to Safe Teen Driving” on p. 50. There are excellent tips to reduce the risk of injury or death in car wrecks provided by a certified parent educator with the Parent Encouragement Program (PEP). And speaking of PEP, kudos to writer Robyn Des Roches for her February 2014 article “Fasten Your Seat Belts: Traveling With Toddlers Can Be A Trip,” which Washington Parent recently won a Gold Award in the category of Editorial on Child Development & Parenting Issues from the Parenting Media Association. Access this article on our website: washingtonparent.com.

Thanks for reading,

Jenny

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7pm – Allison Leotta & Neely Tucker
The Writer’s Center, 4508 Walsh St.
8:30pm – Brian Jay Jones
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Saturday, April 18
11am – Valerie Tripp *
Bethesda Elementary School
7600 Arlington Rd.
11am – Susan Coll & Sarah Pekkanen
Residence Inn Bethesda
7335 Wisconsin Ave.
11am – Susan Stockdale *
Bethesda Library, 7400 Arlington Rd.
12:30pm – Jonathan Allen
Residence Inn Bethesda
7335 Wisconsin Ave.
2pm – David Greene
Residence Inn Bethesda
7335 Wisconsin Ave.
2pm – Gene Weingarten & Eric Shansby *
Bethesda Library, 7400 Arlington Rd.
2:30pm – Eric H. Cline
Gallery B, 7700 Wisconsin Ave., Suite E
3pm – Laura Gehl *
Bethesda Library, 7400 Arlington Rd.
4pm – Karen Deans *
Bethesda Library, 7400 Arlington Rd.
5pm - Poetry Readings and Awards
Gallery B, 7700 Wisconsin Ave., Suite E

Sunday, April 19
11am – Brando Skyhorse
Hyatt Regency Bethesda
7400 Wisconsin Ave.
12:30pm – Mark Leibovich
Hyatt Regency Bethesda
7400 Wisconsin Ave.
2pm – Gary Krist
Gallery B, 7700 Wisconsin Ave., Suite E
2pm – Michael Salcman
The Writer’s Center, 4508 Walsh St.
3pm – Anthony S. Pitch
Gallery B, 7700 Wisconsin Ave., Suite E
3pm – “My Favorite Character from a Book” *
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Global Citizen Earth Day Concert

On April 18, the Earth Day Network and The Global Poverty Project have organized a star-studded concert on the National Mall to celebrate the 45th anniversary of Earth Day. Will.i.Am of Black-Eyed Peas fame will be hosting this free event, which seeks to promote activism with chart-topping performances by pop stars like No Doubt, Fall Out Boy, Usher, Mary J. Blige, Train, Common and My Morning Jacket. The concert hopes to spur activism to eradicate extreme poverty and to solve climate change. globalcitizen.org

Suburban Speaker Series

On Thursday, April 23, join the YMCA of Metropolitan Washington and Suburban Hospital as they present “Raising Kids Who Can: Connect – Capable – Count – and Courage” with Betty Lou Bettner, Ph.D., LPC. Dr. Bettner will be providing an outline for meeting the psychological needs of your children while using the crucial 4 C’s. Registration is required. yfsparentspring2015.eventbrite.com

National Math Festival 2015

On Saturday, April 18, discover the power of mathematics in an educational and fun way on the National Mall. Sponsored by the Mathematical Sciences Research Institute (MSRI) and the Institute for Advanced Study (IAS), in cooperation with the Smithsonian Institution, the event will feature more than 30 unique performances, interactive exhibits and lectures with activities for all ages. The festival runs from 10 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., and features some of the most influential mathematicians of our time. mathfest.org

STEM Camps

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If you have a school-aged child there is little doubt that you have heard discussions of STEM initiatives. The acronym, which stands for science, technology, engineering and math, is an interdisciplinary approach to learning. However, as the school year comes to a close you may be wondering how you can continue to fuel your child’s interest in STEM. Fortunately for parents there are many options offered at local day camps, residential camps, local schools and universities.

Check out our STEM Camp Guide on page 58 to learn more about STEM camps for your curious camper.
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For Dr. Katy Nelson, also known as “Dr. Pawz,” life is all about finding balance. She balances raising two young children (Sam, age 7, and Molly, age 3), hosting a radio show, producing and starring in the long-running TV program “The Pet Show,” practicing veterinary medicine and staying active in numerous local and national charities. But if you have the pleasure of meeting Dr. Katy you will quickly realize that she embraces her jam-packed schedule with a radiant smile and a positive attitude. It may seem overwhelming to most, but when we spoke recently she explained that it is all about prioritizing your life. For Dr. Katy her main priority, above all, will always be family. “Your job will be there, but your family might not always be there.”

A widely-respected veterinarian, I recently spoke with Dr. Katy about her other priority – pets! We discussed some common pet questions and how you can prepare your furry friend for spring.

Samantha: In the D.C. area, a large number of households have two working parents. What advice would you give to working families contemplating pet ownership?

Dr. Katy: It really depends on the the type of pet you want to own. Some pets definitely require a lot more care during the day. If you get a cat, and are gone during the day, they are probably going to be just fine … [But] if you are going to be a dog owner in the D.C. area, and both of you have jobs, then I would definitely recommend looking into doggy daycare or having a dog
walking service … Certainly no dog, no matter how well-behaved, should be left home for a whole school or work day … I think the biggest part of getting a pet that needs to be considered is matching the personality of the family to the personality of the dog.

**Samantha:** What consideration should families give to the breed when getting a pet? This pertains more to people getting a dog, unless you think people getting a cat should use the same consideration.

**Dr. Katy:** There is an old joke that dogs have owners and cats have staff. That is pretty much the way it is. But for dogs the big thing is finding a personality that matches your lifestyle. If you are an active family, a family that goes out and hikes or whatever, then you need a dog that is going to be able to do that with you. Consider a terrier of some sort or a retriever, any of these dogs that are able to get out there and be active with you. You are not going to want a chihuahua or a smooch-faced breed … like an English bulldog … My advice if you are considering adoption is to go in and meet with an adoption counselor, and be honest about your lifestyle and what you want out of having a pet. [Counselors] can help make that perfect match for a forever home.

**Samantha:** What are the benefits of having a pet for younger children?

**Dr. Katy:** There are some studies out there showing actual medical and health benefits from having pets. Children that live in a house with pets tend to have fewer allergies and fewer incidents of asthma because they grow up with dirt around them … But I think the biggest benefit of having a pet is it teaches your children empathy because it is tough for a three-year-old, a two-year-old even, to have empathy toward other creatures … I really truly believe that people who grow up loving animals, and of course other people, have a softer spot in their souls. And it teaches you very early on how your actions affect others. I think that is something very, very important in the world today.

**Samantha:** Do you feel like those benefits extend to older children as well?

**Dr. Katy:** Absolutely, you think about a 13-year-old who is caught up in his own world with texting and hormones. But the calming effect that pets can have on people centers you. You cannot be mad at the world when you have a dog with his head in your lap, you just cannot … And this has been shown in all age groups.

**Samantha:** Should parents consider the age of their children when they are considering owning a pet? Should they wait until their children are a little bit older before bringing a pet into the household?

**Dr. Katy:** Well it really depends on the type of pet you are getting. There are definitely some dogs, such as smaller dogs and more patient dogs, that are going to be able to come into a household and do fine no matter what the age … It is not a matter of waiting to get a pet, it is a matter of getting a pet that is appropriate for your family … There is a dog out there for everyone.

**Samantha:** Is there a breed of dog that is better for younger children?

**Dr. Katy:** There are definitely some [breeds] that have certain

There is an old joke that dogs have owners and cats have staff.

That is pretty much the way it is.

But for dogs the big thing is finding a personality that matches your lifestyle.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 18
TOP 10 PET TIPS
CONTINUED FROM PAGE 17

Dr. Katy: The first thing is to make sure it is actually dry or itchy skin, not ticks or fleas. I would recommend consulting with your veterinarian … Fish oil also really helps with their skin, coat, heart and joints. Your veterinarian may recommend an antihistamine or therapeutic baths if the dry and itchy skin persists. I also recommend infusing organic coconut oil for small, dry patches of skin.

Samantha: Is it common for pets to experience spring time allergies like humans?

Dr. Katy: Absolutely, we definitely live in an area with a lot of pollen. So pets are just as likely as us to experience allergies … [Allergies are] typically more skin-related, but it can also cause GI (gastrointestinal) distress.

Samantha: Do you have any suggestions for ways to treat pet allergies?

Dr. Katy: A simple tip is to keep baby wipes by the door. When [your dog] comes inside they are going to have a lot of pollen on them. So just give them a quick wipe, and also remember to change the air filters in your air conditioning unit, which can help a lot. You should also make sure you have flea and tick protection on [your pet] at this time of year.

Samantha: As the weather warms up this also means a resurgence of ticks. How can owners protect their dogs and cats from tick bites?

Dr. Katy: Prevention really is the key. Ticks can be deadly so using a monthly preventative is really important, and I recommend using them year-round.
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April 2015 washingtonparent.com 19
Earth Day, coming just as the ground warms and turning thoughts to the planet our children will inherit, is the perfect time to consider the benefits that children reap through gardening.

The benefits go beyond the fun of playing in dirt to absorbing life lessons while observing life cycles. Growing plants – whether flowers, fruits, herbs, trees or vegetables – helps children grow. Gardening, with its responsibilities and rewards, boosts children’s self-esteem while developing their sense of caring beyond themselves. This includes not only caring for the plants, but for the people, butterflies and wildlife that enjoy what is growing.

The big picture, according to the National Center for the Education of Young Children in Washington, covers everything from being in touch with the diversity of the world around them, developing their own identity and cultivating environmental stewardship to exploration, play, creativity, relationship building, broadened views of society and learning. It’s no surprise that the prevalence of school gardens are on the increase.

For parents, gardening creates a shared interest and time together outdoors. “It’s like one-stop shopping for parents and values,” says Patricia Cancellier, education director at the Parent Encouragement Program in Kensington, MD. “I couldn’t think of another learning activity that has so much value to it.”

Some specifics: The parent-child bond in working side-by-side and encouraging healthy eating – and cooking; the child gaining a sense of accomplishment, but also learning from having a plant die or get devoured by animals; the enjoyment of the fruits of her labor; the social aspects that include creating something that is shared by others – whether that is because it is edible or beautiful or habitat, and whether sharing means contributing to meals at home or feeding friends, the needy or wildlife. Children also learn about the soil, insects, plants, habitat and the environment, with a little math thrown in (How tall is that sunflower? How much water does the watering can hold?).
With gardening, Cancellor says, “the kids get to play in the dirt and the parents get to foster something good in it.”

Lisa Burke, a master gardener and naturalist, has turned her Washington backyard into gardens and an ecosystem. Her sons’ gardens include chocolate mint for her older child’s favorite tea, along with plants that nourish the family and wildlife. The family shares their bounty with neighbors and friends, and they are learning first-hand about the environment, she said. They feel like young scientists and budding researchers.

“They just got guinea pigs. They are going to have their own guinea pig garden -- they are researching what guinea pigs eat. Then we will use [the guinea pigs’] bedding in compost,” Burke says. “They are learning to take care of the planet. They are conscious that we are creating habitat and that we are keeping the habitat healthy. That is why we compost, that is why we have rain barrels.”

Growing plants is not dependent on having a backyard plot or space in a community garden, and it can be done in kid-sized bursts of time. Gardens grow in pots and pails on a balcony or patio, and plants don’t know if they’re in stylish containers or old pails. Vines of flowers or small fruits can be trellised upward or woven through a railing.

To start, parents should decide how much space and time will be devoted to gardening, where there is enough sun – plants typically need good soil, sunlight and water. You may need fencing so that the garden is not eaten by rabbits, groundhogs or deer. Read up on plant requirements and size at maturity, so that you are not trying to grow a larger fruit, such as a watermelon, in a small space. One 16-inch pot can grow several different herbs.

Be realistic about what your child can do physically, her attention span, her patience. The orderly rows that you like may give way to your child scattering the seeds, which will grow anyway. Do you want to grow from seeds? Buy seedlings? Both?

Talk with your child about what he or she likes to eat and what wildlife eats.

Include your child in deciding what to grow. If cherry tomatoes are a favorite food, grow them. Will he try something new? If a mini-pumpkin excites your child, grow that. If a rainbow of beans appeals to her, grow bush beans in purple, yellow and green. If she wants butterflies to visit, grow the flowers and herbs that attract pollinators.

Does she want flowers in her favorite colors? Gourds for birdhouses she can decorate? A themed garden – such as a pizza garden, planted with tomatoes, herbs and toppings?

Together you should select plants that offer the best chance for success. Buy good soil and compost (leaf compost does not smell the way manure ones do) to add to your soil. Zinnias and dahlias, basil and oregano, squash and tomatoes are among the many plants that grow readily in the Washington area, and can be container-grown.

Create cozy hiding places. Cross and secure the tops of two lines of tall poles to make a tunnel; tie the tops of five tall poles together for a tipi. Vines – morning glories and pole beans, for example – will cover the poles.

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Whether you are standing atop the hillside at Mt. Vernon, strolling over the Memorial Bridge to Arlington or hiking in Great Falls State Park, the Potomac River is a keystone of the Washington, D.C. metro area. Even beyond our boundaries, the river is a life source for over five million people living in its watershed. Despite the broad reach of the Potomac River, and the invaluable resources it provides, this tributary has a long history of pollution and mistreatment. Fondly called the “nation’s river,” the Potomac has unfortunately earned a reputation as one of the most polluted rivers in the United States. A 1951 article in The Washington Post called the Potomac “an open sewer.” Despite the countless environmental concerns, the Potomac Conservancy, a local group of committed citizens, has never wavered in the struggle to protect the future of the river.

Founded in 1993 by a group of concerned recreationalists, the Potomac Conservancy operates by a simple, yet poignant philosophy: “The foundation of a healthy, sustainable and connected community starts with clean water.” This is a cause that the Potomac Conservancy president Hedrick Belin stands firmly behind. He finds that part of what makes the Potomac River issues so pressing is the fact that its health affects everyone. “It is a very local issue because it is in peoples’ backyards; it is where they live; it is where their kids live.” By educating the public, working with landowners on pollution reduction, advocating for increased legislative protections and holding community-wide cleanups,
the Potomac Conservancy has created the momentum for change spanning more than two decades.

Despite impassioned responses from the community, Belin bemoans that the Potomac River still faces threats to its sustainability. Due to the fact that the river flows over 382 miles, stretches into four different states and extends into widely varying geographic neighborhoods, finding the source of the Potomac’s pollution can be tricky.

Runoff pollution remains one of the most pressing issues facing the health of the river, believes Belin. “Whether it is an urban area with polluted runoff washing whatever is on the street down the storm drains or the washing of manure into the rivers and streams in the more rural parts of the watershed, the challenge remains in addressing each of these issues individually,” states Belin. He adds, “At the same time we must remain focused on the larger issue – the overall preservation of the river.”

Despite their united efforts, the Potomac Conservancy cannot do it alone. Over the years, volunteers have continued to have a tremendous impact on helping to further the Potomac Conservancy’s aspirations. Whether it is cleaning up a tributary or talking to local representatives about initiatives to protect the waterway, Belin asserts, “People are going to speak up for clean water, stand up for clean water and show up for clean water.” A recent example of citizens “showing up” for change occurred in Montgomery County. A group of concerned citizens reached out to the county council concerning tree conservation. Because of their efforts, the council enacted legislation to protect existing trees and to plant more trees in the county’s urban areas. By “speaking up” for expanded tree planting, people were able to inspire real, lasting change for improved stream quality and watershed health.

Aside from speaking to legislators, those interested in

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MAKE A DATE CONTINUED FROM PAGE 21

Recycle. Start seeds in clean yogurt cups with a drainage hole in the bottom; turn buckets into planters ripe for decorating. Compost unwanted greens and leaves for plant nutrition.

And who knows what fun memories you'll create?

Burke helped her father with his small garden. She has warm recollections of family trips to harvest at a farm run by nuns, which included her aunt. It was comforting to know some of the produce would feed the needy.

She also recalls as a child running to the lush yard of a neighbor: “He had tall purple alliums. We used to go over when he wasn’t there and pretend they were microphones, and we would sing Michael Jackson [songs].”

Andrea Siegel is a freelance writer and master gardener in Maryland. She gardened with her now-grown children.

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Potomac River conservation can also venture out and “literally” get their hands dirty at any of the community cleanups hosted by the Potomac Conservancy. On April 11, the organization will be hosting one of their largest annual initiatives, the Potomac Watershed Cleanup. Partnering with the Alice Ferguson Foundation, the Potomac Conservancy will be holding cleanups across the D.C. metro area – from Fletcher’s Boathouse to Teddy Roosevelt Island and beyond. No skills are required – all you need is a passion to help preserve the Potomac River.

Beyond restoring the shorelines, Belin finds that there are deeper life lessons that can be learned through these community-wide cleanups. He describes one recent cleanup with a Boy Scout troop in Cabin John. The group set out with their trash bags ready to work, but when they returned they had not picked up much trash. In fact, Belin recalls, “some kids picked up more dirt on their clothes by bouncing around outside.” Belin laughs when he remembers the way the troop came bounding back, but he finds their enthusiasm to be a great example of what can be learned during these days of service. “It’s about the journey that hopefully many of them will continue in terms of being connected to the lands and waters of their backyard, wherever they live.”

The Potomac River has come a long way since the U.S. Public Health Service declared it unsafe for swimming in 1957. Sadly, today it still faces continued challenges due to habitat destruction and pollution. In fact, in 2012 it was chosen as the most endangered river in the country by the American Rivers Organization. And as Congress threatens to slash the funding needed to protect the Potomac’s health, the river’s future remains precarious. However, despite the hurdles, you can still find volunteers on a clear, blustery day along the Potomac’s shoreline working to restore the health of our “nation’s river.”

This spring, Belin encourages everyone to come out and join their “mercy band of river warriors.”
In The Loop
eNews by Washington Parent Magazine

Here’s what you can find 5 days a week!

MONDAY
Homeschooling
Dedicated to all things homeschooling and education.

TUESDAY
Trending Tuesday
Krafty Kids, Kidz Kafe, Parents’ Place and all the things we love.

WEDNESDAY
All Things Food
Tons of great recipes and all things food and beverage.

THURSDAY
Out ‘n About
Things to do around the D-M-V area, A Look Ahead and Editor’s Picks!

FRIDAY
Deals & Steals
Coupons, discounts, deals and freebies!

Coming Soon!
COOKIES & MILK
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