



Meet Cover Director Marty Clark, Riverfield Country Day School — Tulsa, Oklahoma

Llamas raise their heads over the barnyard fence, children paddle across the pond in bright yellow boats, and a troop of young children and adults follow pygmy goats through the grass. It's a beautiful summer day at Riverfield Country Day School in Tulsa. Toddlers squeal down the slide into a deliciously muddy puddle, others splash paint onto paper with fly swatters. One class, sketch boards in hand, spreads out near the bridge to draw. Other children board the bus for swimming lessons, and still others are off in the woods scooping clay from the creek. These activities invite our enthusiasm, but it is the interactions among and between children and adults that speak to the quality of life and learning in this place. And the heart and soul of what happens is pictured on our cover in the caring, positive, beaming commitment of Marty Clark — the woman who must never sleep! How else could she do everything she does?

Riverfield was founded in 1984 by Marty and her husband, Tom, assistant head of Riverfield, working with a group of parents and teachers — all committed to providing an enriching environment where children could learn at their own pace in an all day early childhood program and kindergarten. Their five year dream was to take their school into the country where 100 children could enjoy learning in a natural setting. But they weren't thinking big enough. The school opened with 40 children, ages three months to second grade, and a plan to add a grade each year; enrollment more than doubled in five months. So plans were accelerated and Riverfield relocated to its present location in August 1991. The following year, a library wing, with computer lab and music room, was added. The middle school opened in August 1994. Currently, the 40,500 square foot facility serves over 400 students and is celebrating its thirteenth year.



Photographs by Bonnie Neugebauer

Growth continues with this month's acquisition of adjacent acreage for possibly building a sports facility and swimming pool. And there is pressure from some parents to add high school classes.

Riverfield is an independent, non profit school serving children ages eight weeks through eighth grade. It was the first early childhood pro-

gram in Tulsa to be accredited by the National Academy of Early Childhood Programs, the second program in Oklahoma — and that was in 1985.

The 32 acre wooded campus provides an extension of the classroom all year, with hiking trails, a low ropes course, picnic and music areas, a creek, and wilderness to explore. Summer Camp complements the school year program with a change of pace; school-agers enjoy Camp Raven. Children in middle school can apply for the counselor in training program.

An open architectural design and natural lighting create an inviting indoor environment. Each classroom opens onto a separate playground. Special indoor features include the aerospace classroom, the wet room for messy toddler play, as well as large common areas. Each child through third grade is assigned a family group teacher. Children in the three to five year old mixed age classes have a Buddy Class of older children who take them on hikes and read to them.

"What works for young children works for older children as well. It's the same philosophy. There are developmental issues all along the way, but each child is an individual and needs to work at his own pace. I think schools get in trouble when they forget that, just like toddlers, adolescents are individuals — they don't fit molds. Our mixed-age classes enable a child to work in different ranges. He might seek out one buddy for math, and a different one for reading. It's fascinating how a child is able to find others who are where he is." (Marty Clark)

Riverfield is full of life and enthusiasm, and that, of course, leads back to the administration of Marty Clark. Caroline Johnson, who has known Marty as a parent and staff member has this to say: "Marty's administration is very hands on. She works with us in the same way that we have learned to work with children. When we have conflicts or problems, she turns it around by asking us what we think should happen, what are our ideas. And we walk away thinking we have resolved the issue. We feel a lot of ownership in what happens here."

"Her big thing is catching us being good (just as we do with children). She is involved in every aspect of the school and knows what is going on. She is a firm believer in *Management By Walking About*. When we were small, Marty began writing an individual thank you note in each of our paychecks, a comment about something good she had observed. And now that we are so much bigger — she still does this! Somehow (we think by not sleeping) she finds the time to do the things we think and talk about doing, but never get to."

Marty says: "It's important for Tom and me to get to know the families. Every fall, we have a potluck for each classroom (18 in all), usually in a family home. We attend them all. I depend on parents for help. I ask and wait. Great things happen! That's how we find board members, how we found out about the land for the sports center. Parents provide all sorts of help because they will do anything for the benefit of their children. Parents have helped with our capital campaigns, they guaranteed part of the loan for the school and donated the architectural design for the building. Parents really feel they are part of our school."

In her career, Marty has founded five schools. She is currently president of OAEYC, and is deeply involved in working out the merger of this organization with Oklahoma's chapter of SECA, OECA. She has been a board member and past president of Friends of Day Care, and a board member of the Child Care Resource Center. She served on the Mayor's Commission on Women, and Tulsa Junior College's Task Force for an Associate Degree in Early Childhood Education. She is a validator and mentor for NAEYC.

Marty's positive attitude is contagious. She lives out what she believes and her enthusiasm draws children, staff, and parents into the spirit of Riverfield.

— *Interview by Bonnie Neugebauer*