

parentlink

A newsletter for parents published by the Voluntary Interdistrict Choice Corporation • Volume 29, Number 1, November 2014



VICC mom Linda DeCosta is a new addition to the PTO board at Parkway's Wren Hollow Elementary School. Standing with Linda are PTO co-presidents Deidre Jones, left, and Tracy Jumps, as well as principal Matt Miller. Close friendships have developed between DeCosta and the other six moms who serve on the board.

Photo by Peggy Magee

VICC MOM JOINS PTO BOARD; CLOSE FRIENDSHIPS DEVELOP

by Peggy Magee

What began as an informal gesture to add some diversity to the PTO board at Parkway's Wren Hollow Elementary School has resulted in genuine friendships among a group of women who, in their words, "hit it off."

Linda DeCosta, a VICC mom who has always been involved in her children's education in the Parkway district (see story below), was asked last spring to join the seven-member PTO board at Wren Hollow. Enthusiastically, Linda agreed. She filled one of the vacant vice-presidency seats, a two-year commitment.

The idea to invite Linda to serve came from principal Matt Miller who has always desired more diversity on the board in the hopes of building and improving relationships among his school families. "All of us on the board thought it was a great idea," reports co-president Deidre Jones. "Linda has been a great

addition. We all hit it off with her." Co-president Tracy Jumps agrees. "Linda fit right in," adding that the board members get along great with each other. "We work well together."

During the summer, the women planned a couple of social gatherings, in addition to their regular board meetings. One was a pot luck to welcome and thank the dozen or so committee chairs, held at the home of Jaime Dix, who shares the vice presidency duties with Linda. Another time, they sat around the suburban Cool Dell Swim Club, soaking up the sun, before heading to school for a board meeting. Jones and Dix took turns transporting Linda, who resides in south St. Louis, to the gatherings.

Linda welcomed the opportunities to get to know her fellow board members. "It's been fun. We just hit it off. They are amazing."

Hoping to replicate the connection they have made with Linda, the board plans to host a bar-b-que for VICC families in Tower Grove Park in the city. "Forming this bond with Linda has been awesome," notes Jones, however Linda represents just one VICC family and the board would like to form relationships with many more. She adds, "We value their input in helping make our school better." Also, she notes, there's the "bigger picture" of working to bridge cultures. "Sometimes it's the smallest things that can have the greatest outcomes."



Rams fans and Wren Hollow PTO board members Linda DeCosta, right, and Deidre Jones had fun attending a pre-game Meet and Greet together.

GOOD PARENTING LEADS TO GOOD STUDENTS

by Peggy Magee

When VICC mom Linda DeCosta joined the PTO board at Parkway's Wren Hollow Elementary School last spring, she quickly won the hearts of her fellow board members. The admiration the suburban moms have for Linda made this writer eager to get to know her. What follows will shed some light on DeCosta, a delightful, bright and straight shooting mother of three. Some of her parenting beliefs and practices, described here, were adopted from her own mother and are worth sharing. They are strategies that serve the DeCosta children well.

"I am my children's first and best advocate.

No one has more of a vested interest in my children than I do. If I don't care, why should anyone else?" This view on parenting was passed along to DeCosta by a parent educator in the St. Louis Public School district when her oldest daughter, Tokarra, was in preschool. DeCosta's actions center around it and her children's

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successes testify to the effectiveness of her proactive parenting. Tokarra, who ran track and did color guard at Rockwood Summit High School, received the coveted Falcon Flight award, a teacher-recommended distinction honoring overall achievement. She will graduate in December and, as a first generation college student, will begin classes at UMSL right away.

"I tell my children: "You have one job: to go to school and do your best."

When they talk about what they want to do in life, I always stress that there are steps they have to take to get there, such as doing well in school." DeCosta's son Ryan is a third grader at Wren Hollow Elementary, where his mom serves as vice-president of the PTO board (see front page story). Ryan, lovingly described as "a bit of a drama king," by his mother, struggles with getting himself going in the morning, even pleading with her at times to allow him to stay home from school. "I tell him that school is his job and he can't just take a day off of work whenever he wants."

"I make a point of giving my children's teachers my contact information and stressing to them that I want to be notified if they have concerns."

Her reasoning: "I can't help the teachers help my children if I don't know what is going on." Here's an example of DeCosta's hands-on approach: Last year, when her daughter, Nykiema, who was attending Wren Hollow with Ryan (she's now at Parkway South Middle School) was asked by the school bus driver to sit at the front of the bus, Nykiema mentioned it to her mother. It was a routine seating reassignment involving all passengers, however DeCosta, not knowing that, wondered if there was a problem. When she walked her children to the bus stop as usual, she asked the driver about the change in seating. Not only did the driver assure her that there wasn't a problem, she complimented DeCosta on her children's behavior.

"I make my presence known at school."

My children deserve it." Linda's mother, Viola Tate, worked night jobs so she could make impromptu visits at her children's schools. DeCosta remembers her

schoolmates passing her in the hallway and reporting to her, "Your mamas up here again." When DeCosta had concerns about Ryan's preschool, located near their home in south St. Louis, she showed up at school one day to observe in his classroom. "That's my right," she insists. Last spring, when work commitments prevented DeCosta's husband Reuben from attending Nykiema's fifth grade banquet, grandma Tate happily accompanied the family to the event.

"The internet is a wonderful tool."

I take time to learn how to navigate it so I can help my kids." DeCosta makes it a practice to check out the websites of her children's teachers to utilize the resources found there. She also searches the web for helpful educational materials. Two years ago, Nykiema won a Mothers' Day essay contest sponsored by Dierbergs in which she reported on how great a mother she has.

"I tell my children: "Never allow someone to make you less than who you are."

One time, a bullying incident by another student prompted Tokarra to tell the bully off. When mom found out, she advised Tokarra to never reduce herself to another person's level.

"I talk to my children about the gratification that comes with doing a job well."

I want them to take pride in what they do." At Wren Hollow, Nykiema participated in Girls on the Run, a program that inspires girls by using a curriculum that integrates running, which required her to get up even earlier than normal two mornings a week so she could train with the others before the start of classes. This regimen was especially challenging because of her unhealthy weight, her mom points out. Nykiema persevered and accomplished the culminating run, a 5K. "She was justifiably proud of herself and I was thrilled too," reports DeCosta. Another point of pride for her was when Ryan was acknowledged with a good citizenship certificate for going out of his way to help another student.

Good kids who have the benefit of a good mom!

ANNUAL NOTIFICATION: Regarding Student Records Maintained by VICC

The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) affords to parents/guardians ("parents") of students, and to students themselves who are over 18 years of age ("eligible students"), certain rights with respect to the student's education records. Although FERPA does not apply to VICC, VICC as a matter of policy intends to comply with the provisions of FERPA and to afford parents and eligible students certain rights set forth in FERPA with respect to education records maintained by VICC.

These rights, as they pertain to education records maintained by VICC, are outlined below:

1. The right to inspect and review the student's education records within 45 days of the day VICC receives a written request for access. Parents or eligible students should submit to VICC's Chief Executive Officer (CEO) a written request that identifies the record(s) they wish to inspect. VICC's CEO or his/her designee will make arrangements for access and notify the parent or eligible student of the time and place where the records may be inspected.

2. The right to request the amendment of the student's education records that the parent or eligible student believes are inaccurate, misleading or otherwise in violation of the student's privacy rights under FERPA. Parents or eligible students who wish to ask VICC to amend a record should write VICC's CEO, clearly identify the part of the record they want changed, and specify why it should be changed. If VICC decides not to amend the record as requested by the parent or eligible student, VICC will notify the parent or eligible student of the decision and advise them of their right to a hearing regarding the request for amendment. Additional information regarding the hearing procedures will be provided to the parent or eligible student when notified of the right to a hearing.

3. The right to privacy of personally identifiable information in the student's education records, except to the extent that FERPA authorizes disclosure without consent. One exception which permits disclosure without consent is disclosure to school or VICC officials with legitimate educational interests. A school or VICC official includes a person employed by VICC as an administrator, supervisor, instructor, counselor or support staff member; a person serving on VICC's Board; a person (including a volunteer) or company with whom VICC has outsourced services or functions it would otherwise use its own employees to perform (such as an attorney, auditor, transportation contractor or transportation manager) and who is under the direct control of VICC with respect to the use and maintenance of personally identifiable information from education records; any of the member school districts participating in VICC and the school officials, employees and agents of such districts; or a parent, student or other person serving on an official VICC committee or assisting another school official in performing his or her tasks. A school or VICC official has a legitimate educational interest if the official needs to review an education record in order to fulfill his or her responsibilities with respect to transfer students and the transfer program. Upon request, VICC discloses education records without consent to officials of a school district in which a student seeks or intends to enroll, or is already enrolled if the disclosure is for purposes of the student's enrollment or transfer.

4. Although not applicable to VICC, FERPA generally affords the right to file a complaint with the U.S. Department of Education concerning alleged violations of FERPA by school districts receiving federal funds. The name and address of the Office that administers FERPA are:

Family Policy Compliance Office
U.S. Department of Education
400 Maryland Avenue, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20202-8520

The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), a Federal law, requires that schools receiving Federal funds, with certain exceptions, obtain your written consent prior to the disclosure of personally identifiable information from your child's education records. However, VICC may disclose appropriately designated "directory information" without written consent, unless you have advised VICC to the contrary in accordance with VICC procedures. The primary purpose of directory information is to allow VICC to include this type of information from your child's education records in certain school or VICC publications. Examples include:

- VICC newsletters;
- A playbill, showing your student's role in a drama production;
- The annual yearbook;
- Honor roll or other recognition lists;
- Graduation programs; and
- Sports activity sheets, such as for wrestling, showing weight and height of team members.
- Directory information, which is information that is generally not considered harmful or an invasion of privacy if released, can also be disclosed to outside organizations without a parent's prior written consent. Outside organizations include, but are not limited to, companies that manufacture class rings or publish yearbooks. In addition, two federal laws require local educational agencies (LEAs) receiving assistance under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA) to provide military recruiters, upon request, with the following information – names, addresses and telephone listings – unless parents have advised the LEA that they do not want their student's information disclosed without their prior written consent.

If you do not want VICC to disclose directory information from your child's education records without your prior written consent, you must notify VICC in writing within 20 days after this notice has first been disseminated in the school year. VICC has designated the following information as directory information:

1. Name
2. Date and Place of Birth
3. Grade Level
4. Dates of Attendance
5. Degrees, Honors, and Awards Received
6. Photograph
7. Participation in Officially Recognized Activities and Sports
8. Weight and Height of Members of Athletic Teams
9. The Current and Most Recent Previous

Educational Institution Attended by the Student Any claims or disputes arising under or relating to the matters set forth in this notification are subject to the binding arbitration provisions and remedial limitations contained in paragraphs 23 and 24 of Appendix C of the 1999 Settlement Agreement.



Message from the

David S. Glaser

CEO

The ongoing violence in the news and in our community has created a renewed focus on school safety for all of us. VICC's role in this regard is primarily related to the safe and professional transportation of our students to and from school. Strategies that we have implemented, working together with our school bus and taxi transportation partners, include the following:

- Safety is discussed and is an agenda item at every transportation employee meeting.
- All transportation employees are subject to stringent background checks to confirm their suitability to transport students.
- An incident reporting system is in place for all of our transportation systems.
- All buses are equipped with GPS tracking systems as well as multiple security cameras.
- All buses are equipped with two-way radios and regular ongoing communication

between drivers and their dispatcher, as well as the VICC office, is strongly encouraged.

- Our transportation safety representatives have been trained by the TSA (Transportation Security Administration) and provide yearly training to all bus drivers.

More important than these safety measures are the ongoing positive and cooperative relationships that bus and taxi drivers develop with their students and with school district employees, as well as the relationship parents develop with one another. Our transportation office also regularly meets with school district administrators and staff to encourage regular communication and reinforce the character traits taught at the school. To emphasize character education, our office has hosted several workshops on the importance of this topic for bus drivers and other transportation employees.

We also encourage teachers and administrators at schools to "ride along" on our buses so that they have an improved understanding of what it is like to ride the bus from the city to the county district and also have additional opportunities to develop stronger relationships with your students in a new setting. On average, a VICC student's ride both to and from school is 54 minutes in length which is obviously much longer than the ride of a typical resident student. During that time, many of our drivers have the opportunity to reinforce the positive character education lessons that students are taught at school such as the three B's - Be Respectful, Be Responsible and Be Safe. Certainly those are important lessons that serve as good reminders to all of us.

We take the responsibility of transporting your students very seriously and seek to do so not only in a timely manner but, more importantly, in a safe manner as well.