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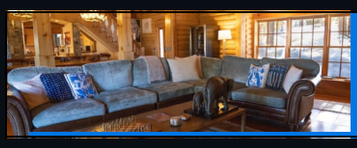
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TOP STORY SPOTLIGHT

'It's magical': Peninsula Montessori Academy prepares for launch in Getzville

Ben Tsujimoto 6 hrs ago 0

“Water playing and food are the way to a toddler’s heart. You’ve got those two things, and you’ve got a best friend forever,” says Jessie Styers, in the new toddler room at Peninsula Montessori Academy.
Sophia Buonpane, Buffalo News

Ben Tsujimoto

Jessie Styers was eager to show off the brand-new **Peninsula Montessori Academy**, which will welcome kids 6 weeks to 5 years old to its Amherst location in September.

In the infants room, a handful of cribs line the wall, and interesting materials – such as a soothing rain stick, fidget-friendly wood blocks and soft, raised mats – dot the more active area for crawling explorers discovering their senses.

Jessie Styers, Peninsula Montessori Academy head of school, arranges animal figurines on a shelf in the new infant room. The Getzville school, which will serve children between 6 weeks and 5 years old, will launch in about a month.
Sophia Buonpane photos, Buffalo News

“They have the freedom to move,” Styers, the head of school, said. “They have the freedom to coo and learn the language, to talk with their caregivers.”

It was the first of three classrooms that will launch in about a month, she said, and all three hold hints of adventure. Styers emphasized, however, that the tools and setting come second to the Montessori mission: child-driven learning that develops interests, encourages independence and fuels creativity while ingraining respect for others.

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The new infant room at Peninsula Montessori Academy.

Sophia Buonpane/Buffalo News

Down the hall, the room slated for toddlers 18 months to 3 years old is geared more toward upright movement, aside from a small nap zone. Mini stations are spread across the room: a child-sized table with bowls and cups, a small drawing board and a door that gives easy access to a grassy area. A major goal of the toddler room is to transition them out of diapers, she said, and acquire basic life skills.

"Kids love water play," Styers said, pointing to a water station with steps leading up to it. "Water playing and food are the way to a toddler's heart. You've got those two things, and you've got a best friend forever."

The new toddler room at Peninsula Montessori Academy.

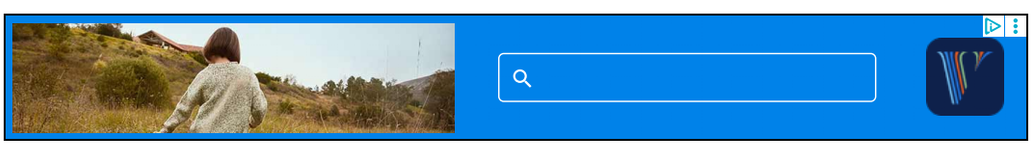
Sophia Buonpane/Buffalo News

The room earmarked for the oldest kids, ages 3 to 5, embraces math concepts and piques the senses. Orderly lines of small beads dangle on one wall, introducing decimals; wooden figurines split in half to convey fractions; and deep blue wooden objects shaped like bowling pins represent geometric solids.

Seeing the hands-on math tools took Styers back to her first exposure to Montessori two decades ago, when her then-3-year-old daughter entered a program in Seattle.

“If I had this, I would like math,” she said.

One of the main traits of Montessori is multiage classrooms, especially for preschool and early elementary. Activities vary in difficulty across the preschool room – a 3-year-old might have immensely different skills than a child about to turn 6 – but there’s social benefit to a shared environment.



“For the 5-year-olds, you’re instilling leadership qualities with them, so they’re like the leaders of the room, and they kind of take charge,” Styers said. “And with the materials in there, they’re showing the other kids how to use them.”

Peninsula Montessori, the parent organization, boasts three locations in Canada and three more in the United States, with three more on the way, according to its

Bennett Park parents question Buffalo Schools' commitment to Montessori

Five parents of students at Bennett Park Montessori Center said they believe their website. The Western New York site is set back from North French Road, just off the Millersport Highway exit, next door to the North French Soccer Complex. The building previously housed Four Seasons Child Care Center.

school has deviated from the Montessori education model and may be misleading parents who believe all students enrolled receive a Montessori education.

Styers, who spent a decade at Nardin Academy's Montessori & Me before applying to lead the new entity in Getzville, said Peninsula's breadth of options should set it apart locally. Full-day infant and toddler programs are common at Montessori schools across the country, she said, but Peninsula's offerings mark the first of their kind in Buffalo. A larger goal is to become an accredited Montessori school within three years, for which Styers will work with Peninsula Regional Director Meghan Rosenfeld.

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Color-coded pencils arranged on the top shelf in the new preschool room at Peninsula Montessori Academy.
Sophia Buonpane, Buffalo News

Peninsula will follow the Amherst Central Schools calendar and will run 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday. Families can choose between half and full days and have the option to pay by the month.

Each room will be led by a primary teacher or caretaker, as well as an assistant, with a maximum of eight kids in the infants room and 10 in the toddler room. The size of the preschool room depends on the breakdown of ages among those enrolled.

Two of the three primary teachers are already Montessori certified, Styers said, and the third is pursuing certification. Peninsula has the space to gradually expand to two infant, four toddler and three preschool rooms, she said. Lower elementary options could be added, too.

Styers seeks to deepen the ranks of Montessori-certified teachers in the area by launching a nonprofit organization focused on preparing instructors for the birth to 3 years old group. She is already an instructor for the Buffalo Montessori Teacher Education Program, which prepares teachers for ages 3 to 6 in Clarence. Ideally, the training program will create a pipeline of caretakers for infant and toddler rooms across the area, which Styers anticipates expanding in the future.

She's excited about the possibilities. Her enthusiasm is most evident as she describes the room for toddlers, whom she has worked with for much of the last decade.

"It's magical," she said.

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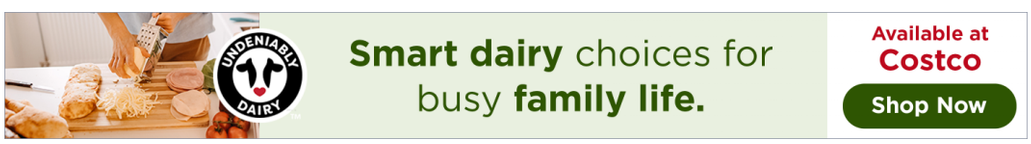

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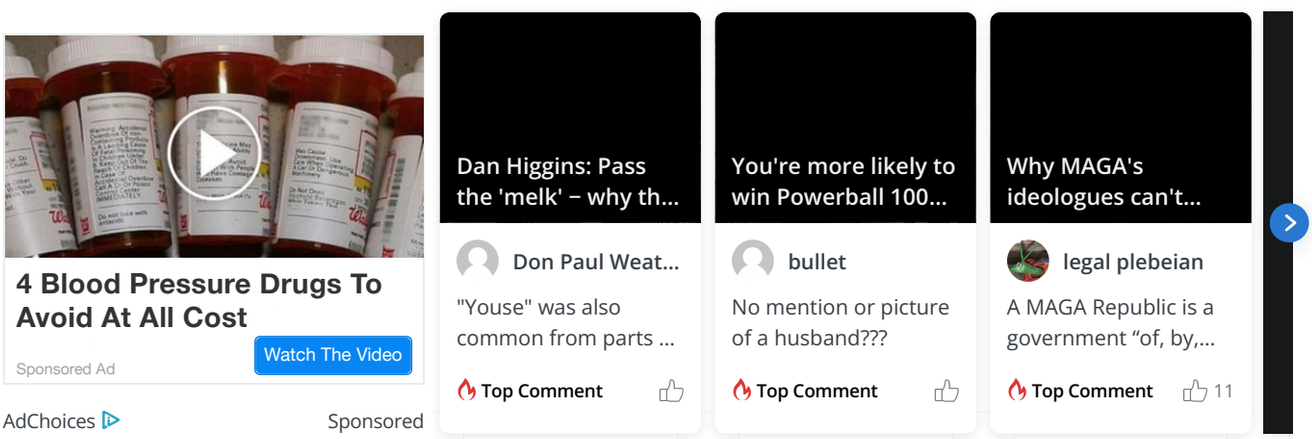

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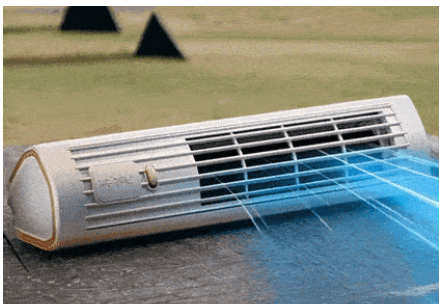

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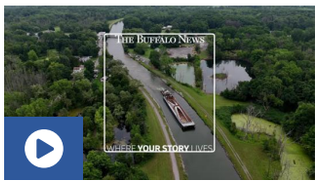

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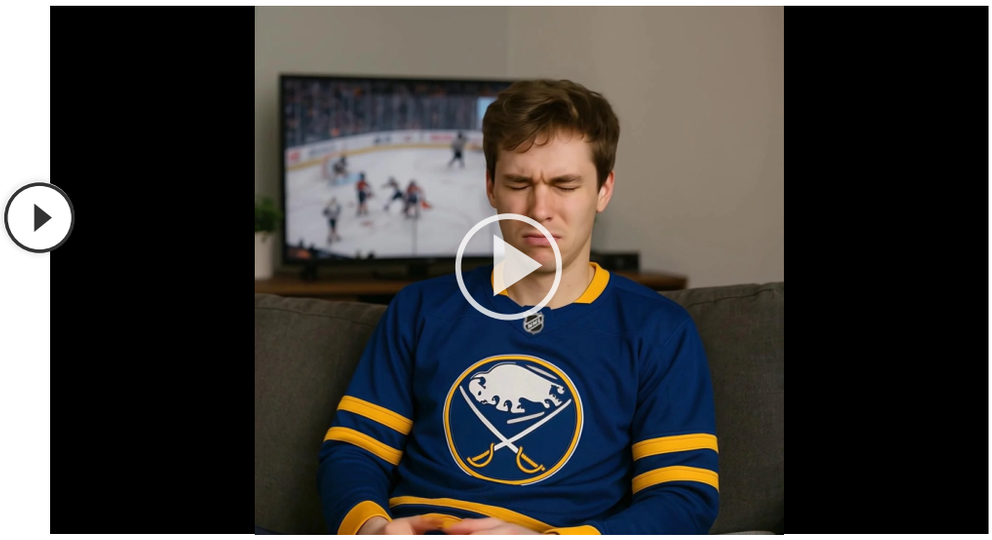

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