

# Mount Vernon-Lee

## CHAMBER of COMMERCE

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### Frog Pond Early Learning Center

When Pam Tinker decided in 1998 to start Frog Pond Learning Center, a non-profit childcare center dedicated to working families, she knew the perfect plot of land and waited three years for it to become available. Now, 13 years later, anyone can tell her wait was well worth it.

Frog Pond Learning Center is tucked away on 7204 Harrison Lane in Alexandria, right next to Huntley Meadows Park. Just minutes from Route 1, the thick oak trees, soft grass, bird calls, goats, butterfly gardens, ducks, and yes, frogs, make the city seem hundreds of miles away.

"It's a real gem to find two acres right next to wildlife," Tinker said.

Frog Pond is a center for 18 month to 5 year old children. The younger 18 month to 3.5 year olds are nicknamed tadpoles while the older group is called frogs.

A child can say hi to the three goats Sam, Max and Henry, look for Monarchs in the butterfly sanctuary, help pick fruits and vegetables from the seven raised gardens, play in the outdoor classroom, climb Toad Mountain and see where a turtle recently laid her eggs, build with blocks, paint a picture, and much more.

"The goal is that they connect with nature and understand the cycles of life and where they fit in," said Tinker.

Part of the reason Tinker, a prior physical therapist for Inova Health System, wanted to start Frog Pond was so children with disabilities



**Pam Tinker leads the parade at Frog Pond Early Learning Center.**

could go to the same preschool as their siblings.

Frog Pond is wheelchair/walker accessible and may be the only Northern Virginia learning center that welcomes children with special needs as part of their mission. At Frog Pond, the goal is to have an inclusion mix where up to 20% of the children have special needs and 20% have financial needs.

Gail, the Director of Operations, enjoys working at Frog Pond because of the mentality that "every creature counts."

Frog Pond thinks about the environment significantly in food selection, cleaning supplies, and paper products. They avoid harsh chemicals in

the building and on the grounds, with sensitivity to the wetlands next door.

Frog Pond is open from 7:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. These longer hours help parents of working families know where their kids are at all times. It provides early childhood education, child care and outdoor connection time all in one package.

"They don't have to piece together childcare," said Tinker.

Frog Pond didn't always look like it does now. Starting a business in Fairfax County is hard and Tinker learned that.

Right after she bought the perfect property for her learning center, fire and building codes changed. The upgrades originally estimated to cost \$50,000 turned into \$150,000 overnight.

Frog Pond Learning Center pulled through the rough times and continues to hope in what the future brings.

This year, they're asking for donations to help replace outdated windows. As for big future plans, Tinker has always wanted a swimming pool to teach water safety. Perhaps one day it will sit among the grass, trees, and goats because after all, according to Tinker, "if you can imagine it, you can do it."

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