

Kinderfarm celebrates its 40th crop of kinder grads

Holly Hines, Iowa City Press-Citizen 11:29 p.m. CDT May 23, 2014



(Photo: Benjamin Roberts / Iowa City Press-Citizen)

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A love of nature helped Katie Hermann-Rogers take a liking to Kinderfarm when she was just 4 years old.

That same love recently brought the 29-year-old back to teach preschool at Kinderfarm Early Childhood Learning Center in Iowa City.

"I kind of felt at home here," she said.

Hermann-Rogers, a Kinderfarm teacher for the past two years, said children at Kinderfarm spend a lot of time outdoors on activities such as gardening and playing with and caring for animals including chickens and fish in a pond on the property.

"I really enjoy that now, and I did as a child," she said.

Hermann-Rogers on Friday attended a celebration marking the 40th class to graduate from Kinderfarm. During the celebration, 27 preschoolers wearing graduation caps with yarn tassels participated in a graduation ceremony outside at the school, located on 20 acres just east of Iowa City along Highway 6.

Heather Norman, co-owner of Kinderfarm, said the preschool is unique because it offers a variety of outdoor experiences in addition to traditional preschool activities.

Those unique activities include planting and caring for a garden, as well as using vegetables from the garden for cooking and making snacks during the school day. She said students also have chores including feeding the animals and gathering chicken eggs.

"It makes for a very busy day," she said.

Norman said she took ownership of Kinderfarm about 21 years ago after attempts to open a daycare in Coralville failed. She had no farming experience when she bought the preschool, but she's learned a lot over the past two decades.

She said she and her husband, co-owner Jeff Norman, have done their best to stick with Kinderfarm's original philosophy of offering kids hands-on, outdoor experiences.

Tom Morgan and Jessica Allbee of West Liberty attended Friday's ceremony to watch their daughter, Jocelyn Morgan, graduate from preschool.

Morgan said his daughter, who will attend Penn Elementary in the fall, is a big fan of Kinderfarm.

"She loves it," he said. "She doesn't want to leave."

Morgan said he thinks Jocelyn got an excellent education at Kinderfarm, including a respect for how to care for animals.

Allbee said she thinks the experience also helped Jocelyn with academic skills, such as counting and learning songs.

"I wouldn't have taken her anywhere else," Allbee said.

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