

---

## FIRESIDE ACADEMY STAFF



### **Angela Landis (*Director and Teacher*)**

Angela was a dual major in anthropology and psychology at Temple University. She homeschooled her two children for fifteen years, and continues to teach others, both at Fireside and other settings. She is passionate about her work as a certified Wilson dyslexia tutor, and also as an English tutor for a foundation designed to empower young women high school basketball players from inner city Philadelphia as they pursue college and careers. Before children, she had worked as the operations manager for a large furniture store and in administration at various colleges, developing the organizational skills necessary to run a homeschool business. She has a great passion for all writing, social sciences and nature study, and enjoys teaching those subjects to children, as well as sharing her knowledge of arts and crafts in enrichment classes. Her greatest delight is in watching her own children, and her beloved students, succeed. In her free time, she enjoys gardening, crafting, cooking, backpacking, and vicariously traveling through time and place with a good book.



### **Laura Dollenger (*Assistant Director and Teacher*)**

I am the proud mom of Danica ("Dani") and happy wife of Andy for 12 years. This school year marks our 4th year at Fireside and our 7th year of homeschooling. We have tried cyber and traditional and we have learned that the latter is where we thrive. Dani and I love field trips and making new friends. In my spare time I enjoy crafting of all sorts, and dreaming of Disney, and I am not ashamed to say I am addicted to all things Disney. In the past I've used my college degree in veterinary science while working in a small animal veterinary hospital here in the Lehigh Valley. I was also a companion caregiver for the elderly in Montgomery County. I loved both jobs but feel like I am the happiest, most content and fulfilled where I am at this point in my life.

## 2018-2019 ADVISORY COUNCIL MEMBERS



### **Emily Hassler (*Advisory Council Member and Teacher*)**

Emily Hassler has been happily homeschooling her two boys, ages 15 and 13, since preschool. Like all homeschooling parents, she enjoys learning along with them, and from them, every day. Her enthusiasm for teaching and guiding children has grown since her homeschooling journey began.



**Kathy Merlino (*Advisory Council Member and Teacher*)**

Kathy has her degree in Elementary Education and has been a stay at home mom for 17 years. This will be her 8th year homeschooling her 3 children and also their 8th year as part of the Fireside Community. Kathy enjoys spending time with her family and friends, crafting, field trips, and anything related to Disney and Harry Potter.



**Tammy Pagats (*Advisory Council Member and Teacher*)**

Tammy is a mother of three who has been homeschooling for the past six years. She has a BS in Accounting from Lehigh University and is currently working on a master's degree at Penn State University in Behavioral Sciences. In addition to caring for my home and family, she volunteers with the local Boy Scout Troop. In her free time, she enjoys long walks on local trails, weekend camping trips, and knitting.



**Susan Ott (*Advisory Council Member and Teacher*)**

Susan has her B.A. in English Education and has taught and tutored students from pre-K to college. She now homeschools her six kids (ages 15-4), and is entering her fourth year with Fireside. She and her husband John believe in giving their kids as many "real-world" experiences as possible, from cultivating their three-acre homestead, to visiting museums & attending shows, to living part-time at the beach! She's an advocate for gifted education & autism awareness, an entrepreneur, a writer, and a former barista. Susan loves good books, strong coffee, animals, performing & directing, creating delicious food in her kitchen, and traveling to new places.



**Sarah Wagenheim (Advisory Council Member and Teacher)**

Sarah is a homeschool mother of two creative children (ages 8 and 10) and is entering her sixth year as a Fireside Academy member. She has a BS in Graphic Design and Advertising with a minor in Religious Studies from Moravian College. Sarah is in design mode 24/7. She and her family are always involved in some form of creative outlet, from studio art to coding apps to theater to dance. She owns a graphic design studio, is an entrepreneur with her husband on various ventures, loves theater and art history, rocked it as a cancer mom, advocates for and rescues animals, drinks black coffee, and wishes she lived at the beach. Her hobbies are designing anything and everything, being creative with her kids, helping with Fireside, loving on her many cats, and traveling with her family on field trips or vacations

## 2018-2019 FIRESIDE ACADEMY TEACHERS



**Sheri Almer**

I was born and raised in Warren County, New Jersey, where I still reside today. I have two boys whom I have been homeschooling for the past nine years. After attending college, I had a long career in the banking and insurance industries. However, as life progressed, I saw the need to commit myself to my children's education, leading me to my homeschooling path, and eventually to Fireside, where we are entering our fourth year. On a personal note, I enjoy being a crafter, displaying my wares on Etsy, and of course my cats!



**Katrina Beier**

Katrina Beier has a passion for all things music. She has been playing piano for over 30 years and violin for over 2.5 years. She also sings and plays a bit of guitar and ukulele. She has played in bands, churches, schools, weddings, college, and theater productions. She currently serves on her church worship team. She has taught piano lessons and preschool music classes. She encourages her students to learn to read music, but also to be able to improv and play by ear. Katrina is a self-professed Potterhead (Harry Potter fan) and is super excited to be teaching the Hogwarts class at Fireside this year.

Katrina has been enjoying homeschooling her 3 kids for 6 years. She also is a birth doula and owner of SideKicks Doula Services. When she's not at work or busy with her family or her instruments, she enjoys being in nature, gardening, crocheting, reading, and talking to her dogs and chickens.



### **Brandy Berenty**

I am the proud momma of three very athletic kids, Shelby is 21, Dillon 17, and Kaitlyn 11. My husband Andy and I have been married 24 year and we have homeschooled all our children for the past 13 years. We love to spend a lot of time outdoors, on the beach, hiking, at Spartan races, and camping. We are very involved in high adventure Scouting. This will be our 4th year at Fireside and we have looked forward to Tuesdays with friends that now feel like family.



### **Kristie DePiero**

Kristie has been homeschooling her two boys, ages 10 and 12, for 6 years. Her homeschooling philosophy is Waldorf inspired, but she considers their homeschool eclectic. She has a degree in Agronomy and Environmental Science from Delaware Valley University and works as a consultant in addition to homeschooling. Any extra free time is spent watching her boys on the ballfield.

### **Danika Dunn**

Danika Dunn managed to graduate magna cum laude from Brigham Young University with a one-year-old in tow. After completing her BS in dietetics, she worked part-time in hospitals and had a private practice for a while, before devoting all of her time to being in the home. She now has five young kids with loads of energy and audacious ideas. She has homeschooled various combinations of her children for the past three years and loves it! She is very active in her church community, and in her limited spare time she enjoys yoga, beekeeping, making lists, and dreaming about homesteading.



### **Shannon Entin**

Shannon Entin is a travel blogger who has been homeschooling her son and daughter since birth (nearly 20 years!). She has a BS in Business Administration and has been an entrepreneur for the past 22 years. An avid traveler, Shannon's hobbies include planning vacations, going on vacations, and writing about her vacations. She also loves watching TV and movies and she co-hosts an entertainment podcast. In her spare time, she enjoys running, collecting maps, and being compulsively organized.



### **Erin Garner**

Erin Garner has been homeschooling for 6 years. Her husband, Brett, and she have 3 girls (10, 8, and 6) and one boy (1). Erin loves to play games, be silly, read books, and watch movies in her occasional spare time. She also teaches a religion course to High School students that attend her local church every morning at 6am.



### **Jenny Hanson**

Jenny spent much of her life in North Dakota and Minnesota before moving to New Jersey 3 years ago. She studied Political Science in college, worked as a radio morning show host, and taught dance to ages 3-13 for over 15 years. This is her 7th year of homeschooling her three children.



### **Alex House-Cooke**

Alex is a homeschool mom to her two children Grace (11), Benjamin (6), and is a native Long Islander who graduated from Kutztown University with a BS in Art Education. After graduation, Alex had a short stint as a day care worker but then hit the road and spent the next 20+ years of her life performing stand-up comedy professionally at comedy clubs and colleges across the country. Dealing with tough crowds and hecklers made the transition to being a mom easy on many levels. Six years in the fitness industry led Alex to discover her latest passion: educating others on chemical free living. When she's not teaching classes on essential oils and empowering others to take charge of their own health, Alex is happy reading a good book, belting out music from musicals, or thinking of ways to embarrass her kids by being a "goofy mom". She's happy to be getting back to teaching what she actually went to college for and finds creating art relaxing and an "escape into the imagination and vacation from the stress and seriousness of everyday life!"



### **Cori Jarczyński**

Cori is a live-ops specialist for an education company, and a stay-at-home, homeschooling mom of her two children, Madelyn and Braden. She earned her bachelor's degree in Business/Marketing from Muhlenberg College. She loves anything food-related, from taking cooking classes, cooking with friends and her kids, and loves to travel...mostly to try new and different foods and restaurants.



### **Paul LaChance**

Paul LaChance, PhD is a former college professor in Theology, now adjunct at NCC. He maintains a private counseling practice in Easton. He has been homeschooling with his two children for 5 years; their homeschooling philosophy focuses on self-directed learning motivated by the children's natural curiosity and supported by parent modeling and guided practice. He enjoys learning new things along with his children and spending as much time as possible outdoors.



### **GarriAnn Lozinger**

(Teacher) Garri Ann Lozinger is a mother of 5 ages 19-6. She has been homeschooling her children for nine years. Before homeschooling, she taught kindergarten art, volunteered at her children's elementary school and volunteered at a local Pregnancy Crisis Center. When she is not shuttling children, she enjoys scrapbooking, crafting, and fitness.



### **Tami Martin**

Tami is a mother of 2 energetic kids. She has been homeschooling for four years. She has been married to her husband Kyle for 13 years. In her spare time, she enjoys gardening and reading.

### **Lori Mehler**

Lori is a versatile educator who loves teaching, writing and gardening. She has a BA in English, a minor in Art and a M.Ed. in Education. She has taught Language Arts in both public and private schools all across the country and is the previous English Department Head of a co-educational wilderness boarding school. She's a former Teacher's Institute of Philadelphia fellow as well as a former Philadelphia Writing Project fellow. Both appointments were held at the University of Pennsylvania. As a homeschooling mom, Lori draws on principles from both Waldorf and Montessori. She believes, like John Taylor Gatto, that "When you take the free will out of education, it turns into schooling." Lori works as a freelance content writer and loves crafting powerful pieces with words.



### **Joy Scott**

Joy Scott jumped into the zany, wonderful world of eclectic homeschooling 7+ years ago alongside her daughter, Rachel (15). She holds a BFA in Medical and Scientific Illustration and works freelance as a graphic designer in her "spare" time. With her family foremost, her passions in life are animals, nature, art, volunteering and living on the family's small farm with their 3 German Shepherds. Her most favorite activities are hiking, exploring and camping in any National Park. She has been a Girl Scout troop leader for the past 9 years and has served as an adult leader in various youth groups, including 4-H, PYC, Girls on the Run and Odyssey of the Mind. She takes a hands-on, visual approach to teaching and believes that

each and every child has their own unique set of gifts that should be respected and nurtured. Our differences are what make us unique and interesting!



### **Kristy Thomas**

Kristy is the mom of two girls and has been homeschooling for thirteen years. In her pre-homeschooling life, she worked in the pharmaceutical industry before returning to college for a degree in teaching science. Her educational philosophy has evolved over the years and is currently a mixture of unschooling and child-led learning. Kristy spent many years as a Girl Scout Leader as well as Activity Director for the Girl Scout Service Unit. Currently, she is a member of her Church Council, the Chair of the Social Ministry Committee, and assists with organizing youth activities. Kristy enjoys learning about and practicing homeopathy and is currently working toward her HHOM certification. In their spare time, Kristy and her family enjoy amusement parks and traveling. They have season passes to Dorney Park and travel to other Cedar Fair parks as well as Disney World as often as economically feasible.



### **Shana Thomas**

Shana was born and raised in Scotch Plains New Jersey. She's been an artist for as long as she can remember and also an active member of the art community for many years in New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Georgia. She's taught art classes, participated in many art events, and created many works of art for more than 30 years. She is married to her awesome husband Bernard and is a proud mother to five beautiful children ages 13-23, two grandchildren ages 1 and 3 years old. Her oldest son proudly served his country well for 4 years in the United States Navy, her oldest daughter is in college majoring in Neuroscience, her other two daughters are in high school, and her youngest son is 13 years old and attends Fireside Academy. She's been homeschooling for two years and enjoys being a major part of her children's education.



### **Chrissy Tomlinson**

I have 2 boys, Dominic and Rocco. I have been married to my husband Andy for 18 years. We have been homeschooling for 2 years. When we began moving a lot for work it became a perfect fit for us. Hopefully we are planted in Bethlehem for a while....I really like it here! Before our homeschooling adventure we owned a trash company in southern Chester County for 8 years. These days I am starting to pursue my passion for photography.



### **Barbara Vogelgesang,**

Barbara has been a homeschool mom for 19 years. She has a BS in journalism from St. John's University & is a graduate of Ringling Bros. Clown College. A mom of 4 children she is also a certified public speaker and has been performing, speaking, teaching and writing for over 30 years. She is currently a teaching artist for Touchstone Theatre's Young Playwright's Lab & works as a freelance costumer & drama teacher. Barbara toured through the US, Canada and Japan with Ringling Bros and other shows. She teaches theater and circus arts for various camps and theater schools. A published author, Barbara has taught writing for homeschool and private organizations.

### **Leah Weikel**

Leah is the mom of 5 children (ages 11, 9, 7, 5 and 3). After sending her oldest to preschool, she and her husband realized that homeschooling was a better fit for their family than traditional schooling. They have been homeschooling for six years now and have learned a lot along the way. They consider their homeschool approach eclectic, some of which includes: painting, reading well-written books, playing with Legos, learning math facts, and spending ample time outdoors. Leah has her undergraduate degree in English from Temple University and her M.Ed. in Secondary Education from East Stroudsburg University. She has a love/hate relationship with cooking and running, but she always loves to dance, write, and drink black coffee. She is in her seventh year of coordinating a local MOPS group. She and her family look forward to this coming year at Fireside.



### **Becky Weiss**

Becky has been homeschooling her 3 girls for nearly 10 years. Her family just reached the 3 year anniversary of arriving back to the US after 5 years of working at a mission in Peru, which is still like a second home. She has a BS in Social Work from Cedarville University and is also a certified Biblical life coach for women in ministry. She has been serving as children's ministry coordinator for their church and also as the Pennsylvania state coach for the IF:Gathering ministry.



### **Vanessa Williams**

Vanessa Williams earned her degree in Finance from DeSales University, graduating with magna cum laude honors. She worked in the banking industry for 10 years ending as an AVP Credit Analyst/ Underwriter for the Small Business Administration. Since summer of 2011, she has been home with her children. Vanessa has two girls in grades 3rd and 6th. This will be her 2nd year at Fireside and 1st year teaching. Vanessa has been a part time swim instructor at Swim in Zone for the past 6 years and specializes in Parent/Child classes and children with fear. She has also been a volunteer teacher at her church for her kid's Prep program for the past 2 years. She has been an advocate for animal adoption and has fostered dogs for the past 20 years. Recently, she started to volunteer with Noah's Ark Rescue Project and Sanctuary (NARPS) where she processes adoption applications and fosters during the summer. When she is not teaching or working, she is running her girls to their dance lessons or competitions and loves being a dance mom. She grew up dancing since 6 years old and continues to take adult lessons. In her spare time, she enjoys reading, watching movies, swimming, being in nature, and being creative. She considers learning a lifelong experience and enjoys new opportunities to grow in knowledge.