

# DAILY TIMES NEWS

## Lightbridge Academy in Garnet Valley offers parents innovative child care



BETHEL >> Local parents living or working in the Garnet Valley area will now have access to a unique educational child care center for children, from 6 weeks old to kindergarten age. The new

child care center will offer children a quality learning environment while giving peace of mind to working parents.

Temple University Professor John Minnebo and his wife, Beatrice, innovators in education, will open Lightbridge Academy this month. The new child care center is based on a holistic approach to child development with a program consisting of a comprehensive education, core values and a unique “Circle of Care.” Currently accepting registrations for infant, toddler and preschool programs, Lightbridge Academy is located at 1363 Naamans Creek Road, across the street from Booths Corner.

Several features of the new Lightbridge Academy set it apart from other child care facilities, the Minnebos explained in a recent interview. The philosophy of Lightbridge Academy is based on the “Circle of Care.” With the child in the center of the circle, the trusted circle of care surrounding the child consists of the parents, teachers and staff, the owners and the community. Treating all those in the circle of care with equal importance and respect creates a nurturing, caring environment, which translates into a high-quality educational experience for each and every child. The model offers support, not only to the child, but also to families and staff.



**Lightbridge Academy owner Beatrice Minnebo holds up her mobile phone to demonstrate how parents can watch their children as they participate in activities throughout the day at the child care center.**

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“The Circle of Care is the center of the Lightbridge Academy business model,” explained John. “We make it our mission to care for every child and every family member that walks through our doors. Every person involved with the child is equally valued by us because he is equally important in the child’s care and development.”

The owners stressed that Lightbridge is a high-quality early childhood educational program and not a babysitting service. They explained that there are many differences between day care centers and educational child care centers such as theirs.

“Our educational child care center provides a professional and nurturing home-away-from-home environment for children where they are not only safe and comfortable but where they developmentally grow and flourish,” explained Beatrice.

Educators at Lightbridge encourage children with a “learning is fun” philosophy through play and positive reinforcement and build upon the skills they acquire at various ages and stages of their development. Each classroom is designed with learning centers to offer children the ability to engage in teacher-led activities, child-led interests and individual play. The center’s curriculum focuses on every developmental area, including creative arts and music, mathematics, technology, physical well-being, science, social and emotional, literacy and sensory and cognitive learning. Children can also learn various languages like Spanish and even American Sign Language. The Minnebos hope to add French and Mandarin Chinese in the future.

The Garnet Valley facility itself is modern and state-of-the-art, featuring developmentally appropriate classrooms, each with its own bathroom, as well as fresh air circulators, bringing filtered outdoor air into the center for a healthier environment. The rooms are bright and cheery, freshly painted in primary colors and tastefully decorated. The outdoor play area is safe and secure, with modern play equipment and clean, padded safety surfaces. There are two playgrounds, divided by age, which are both shaded, fenced and secure with no outside entry.

Inside, there’s a large multipurpose room with high ceilings and little furniture so children can ride trikes, play ball or enjoy hula hoops, dance, soccer and other activities if the weather is not conducive to outdoor play.

The owners pride themselves on the facility’s cleanliness. A professional cleaning crew sanitizes Lightbridge Academy every morning.

Another of the major highlighted features of Lightbridge Academy that sets it apart from other area childcare centers is its advanced technology. Parents have the ability to watch, and even interact, with their children all day long. Although they may be at their desk or on a business trip thousands of miles away, parents can watch what their child’s doing throughout his or her day on their mobile phone, iPad or computer. In today’s economy, dual-income families seem more the norm than the exception. Parents are often stressed and struggling to find good care for their children. Having this unprecedented access to their child’s daily activities through technology helps parents not only have a secure feeling knowing their children are well cared for, learning and enjoying their day, but it also allows parents a window into their child’s daily activities, which facilitates communication when they are reunited later in the day.

“When the parents are back with their children, they can say things like, ‘You were amazing in how you built that house out of blocks today,’ or ‘You really enjoyed those stories about autumn this morning,’” explained Beatrice.

The Academy’s ParentView Internet Monitoring System not only gives parents a live stream of their child in the classroom but also provides a parent eCommunication app that allows teachers to communicate with parents throughout the day by sharing pictures and videos and logging children’s milestones into an online portfolio. Those are just a few of the tools they use to form a stronger home/school connection and build trust with the enrolled families in their centers.

“We are completely transparent,” Beatrice explained. “I’m a parent, and I know how important it is to be able to see and be involved in what your child is doing during the time they are not physically with you. We want parents to feel connected and a big part of their children’s lives at all times.”

Technology is evident in every classroom, equipped with interactive white boards and child-sized tech desks that are especially designed for iPad placement.

The Lightbridge Academy owners value the center’s transparency and the ongoing comfort and connection their technology brings to parents, but they also like the opportunity it gives staff to grow. The center utilizes the latest in technology for the administration to watch the action in all parts of the center. By viewing how staff is interacting with each child throughout the day in every classroom, the owners and directors are able to mentor and support each staff person to provide the best possible teaching strategies and help them grow professionally. This continual video view of classrooms also ensures policies and procedures are being properly implemented.

Lightbridge offers many options to make life easier and a better experience for parents, such as the option of back-up care, nutritious snacks and optional meal plans for their child, extended hours, in-house extracurricular activities, parent workshops and occasional babysitting nights for parents to enjoy a night out.

Every staff position at Lightbridge requires special qualifications. In addition to obtaining their Child Development Association Credential, Lightbridge prefers that all lead teachers hold a minimum of an associate degree in child development or a Bachelor of Arts in education with a focus in early childhood education. Every Lightbridge Academy employee receives a thorough fingerprint and background check prior to employment and must also be CPR and first-aid certified.

In addition to the Minnebos, the center is operated by director Christy McIntire, who has 21 years of experience in child care, and assistant director Melissa Dreding, who has 14 years.

Safety and security are paramount at Lightbridge. Besides the internal video monitoring, the center has a coded entry system, silent alarm systems, indoor sprinkler system and many other security measures in place.

“Our security is unparalleled in the child care industry,” John shared. “Each child’s safety and well-being is our highest priority, and we’ve invested in the latest, state-of-the-art technology to ensure that this place is always safe and secure.”

Although the physical environment is at the top of its game, the learning environment is what truly sets Lightbridge apart from some other centers. According to the owners, Lightbridge Academy encourages children with a “learning is fun” philosophy through play and positive reinforcement and builds upon the skills children acquire at various ages and stages of their development. The center is open to children of all abilities.

Each classroom is designed with learning centers to offer children the ability to engage in teacher-led activities, child-led interests and individual play. Lesson plans build on the skills that each child acquires at various ages and stages of development, in accordance with the theories of Piaget. Lightbridge Academy aligns their philosophy with the thinking of Montessori by focusing on the development of the whole child.

Lightbridge Academy has been raising the bar in the child care industry since its founding in 1997. Over 100 owners have applied for franchises, and 32 sites are already open and running successfully. The others are in the process, preparing for their openings. According to their research, an estimated 14.5 million children are in some form of child care arrangement in the U.S. alone. Lightbridge began in New Jersey but has spread out on the East Coast. The opening of the Delaware County center marks the third in Pennsylvania, with the other two in Fort Washington and Bethlehem.

“We are passionate about education,” John explained. “With us both being educators, when we decided to open our own childcare center, we wanted top-of-the-line in education. We looked around, and we found the best there is with Lightbridge. It incorporates both our values and our education philosophy.”

John and Beatrice, residents of Concord, recognized the need for quality day care in their region.

“This is a very localized business,” John explained. “Parents want child care close by to their homes or their jobs.”

The couple has been involved in education throughout their careers. John teaches European business and other courses at Temple’s Fox School of Business. Beatrice, who also holds a degree in science and biology, teaches French language classes at a Garnet Valley School District enrichment program. The couple has three children who went through Garnet Valley schools, one still at Garnet Valley High School. The family is fluent in several languages, including German, French, English, Spanish and Dutch.

Before opening Lightbridge, Beatrice spent over a month training in Iselin, N.J., to learn the ins and outs of owning a Lightbridge childcare center. She will be the one to handle the day-to-day operations of the center. John will oversee the business end. The Minnebos hope to introduce summer camp programs in the future and perhaps programs for the older siblings of children in their childcare program.

Currently, the center has two infant classes, one for young infants and another for mobile infants, as well as two toddler classes, two 3-year-old classes and two 4-year-old classes.

“Education is extremely powerful,” John stated. “It is extremely rewarding to be involved in the education of young children. To see the results as children grow is just phenomenal. We are honored to have the opportunity to partner with families on their journey through these special years of their child’s life.”

Lightbridge Academy at 1363 Naamans Creek Road is a member of Delaware County Chamber of Commerce. The center is open from 6:30 a.m. to 6:30 p.m. For more information or to arrange a tour, contact director McIntire at [mcintire@lightbridgeacademy.com](mailto:mcintire@lightbridgeacademy.com) or call 610-364-2000. For more information about Lightbridge Academy, visit [www.LightbridgeAcademy.com](http://www.LightbridgeAcademy.com).

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