

ROLL IT WITH IT

Director Stacy Carlock works to bring joy to the Ladue Early Childhood Center

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Walking through the glass doors of the Ladue Early Childhood Center (LECC), a burst of glitter and laughter erupts. A line of smiling preschoolers marches through the hallway, singing songs and carrying art projects proudly. Then, with her signature roller skates and beaming smile,

Director Stacy Carlock glides through the hallway to spread her share of joy. Directors and principals are typically seen as intimidating, but Carlock runs the LECC with a positive presence. She makes it a top priority to cultivate a thriving community and provide for her staff members, making the LECC a welcoming place.

“One of my teacher’s assistants asked me a few years ago if I knew how to roller skate, and I thought, ‘Well, I haven’t skated in years, but I’d love to go skating,’” Carlock said. “So, I went skating with her about three years ago, and I have been skating ever since. She brought back joy to me and gave me a new hobby, and then I brought that hobby to school. It was Halloween one day, and I put my roller skates on with my costume, and that’s where it all started.”

Carlock is a Milwaukee native who received her master’s degree in speech pathology and audiology from Tennessee State University before earning her doctorate from Saint Louis University. During her time as a university student, she was involved in Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority Incorporated (AKA), where she had countless formative experiences and made lifelong friends that she still keeps in contact with today. She also makes a point to teach these values to her loved ones, amplifying the spread of kindness that she strives to create.

“I was on so many committees, and we did a lot of community service events where I was always talking to people and building relationships with people, which helped me to grow my confidence in public speaking,” Carlock said. “It also helped me to network. As far as jobs and things like that, there are people in my sorority all over the world, and we always connect with each other.”

AKA is characterized by many qualities that Carlock incorporates into her life today. Sisterhood, leadership and service are all valuable elements that she makes sure to demonstrate as a way of giving back to her community. Carlock’s participation in AKA has made a long-lasting effect on her commitment to giving back.

“Those are all things that we used to do when I was in college,” Carlock said. “Community service projects, feeding the homeless, providing school supplies and backpacks for kids who are in need. I brought that back home.”

While living in Milwaukee, Carlock worked as a speech language pathologist, then moved into administration by becoming a special education supervisor. She moved to St. Louis in 2010 and spent about four years acclimating to the new city by returning to speech pathology, a familiar trade. In 2014, she circled back to administrative work by accepting a role at the LECC as an area

coordinator. Then, in 2020, Carlock was awarded her title of director, a role that consists of supervising and managing students and staff at the learning center. She entered the new stage of leadership with her signature sense of optimism, ready to maintain a strong community.

“I wanted to get to know everybody again, build some relationships, see what was going on with the building, assess what was going on before I came in directly to make changes,” Carlock said. “My first year was really all about getting to know my staff, building relationships and then figuring out what it is that they wanted to change, things that they thought needed to improve.”

Carlock makes it her mission to brighten days and strengthen relationships within the LECC community, especially among staff. Cases of burnout and stress are sweeping educators across the country, but her social values serve as a breath of fresh air. To boost the workplace morale, Carlock facilitates unique traditions that allow staff members to share delicious food and uplifting moments together. For Carlock, stress is a rare when she’s surrounded by coworkers who double as friends.

“There’s a lot of burnout with teachers, there’s a lot of turnover,” Carlock said. “It’s important to bring back fun in the workplace so that you feel good coming to work every day. People don’t really talk much about this, but there is so much research around the necessity of having fun at work.”

Carlock has been an inspiration for many people during her time as director at the LECC. There are lots of opportunities to learn from her positive attitude, her way of communicating with children and her determination to make sure everyone’s needs are met. It’s routine for Carlock to learn everyone’s names and make personal connections with students and parents. Although Carlock views her staff members at the LECC as role models, they still learn from her unique tactics as an educator.

“We both work with students that sometimes come in having some challenging behaviors, and I have learned so much from [Carlock] in her interactions with the kids that are struggling,” LECC Early Childhood Coordinator Debbie Cohen said. “She’s so good with them and with their families, and I really admire her for her ability to be so child-centered and family-centered.”



Carlock enjoys using different forms of social media to document her unique way of directing the LECC. She uploads videos of her workplace's morning routine, birthday celebrations, rollerskating with students, days in the life and other memorable moments that warm the hearts of her followers. These online profiles had started relatively small, but her audience skyrocketed in August. Her Instagram account currently has over 26,000 followers, her TikTok account has over 10,000 and her Facebook profile has accumulated to over 17,000.

"I never realized how many people I would inspire, but that's one thing I love to do," Carlock said. "I love doing my job, what I'm doing here, but what I really love is inspiring others. I'm just so happy and so thrilled that it has touched so many."

The plethora of fame didn't stop at social media. Soon after the overnight success, Carlock was contacted by The Kelly Clarkson Show, which she described as a surreal experience. She opened the invitation through text from her office, surrounded by her supportive coworkers.

"We looked up the name to make sure it wasn't spam or somebody trying to scam me, because we just couldn't believe it, and it was real," Carlock said. "I'm just like, 'Oh my goodness, they are going to fly me to New York City to come on The Kelly Clarkson Show.'"

Once Carlock landed in the city, it was like she became a celebrity. Her hair and makeup were touched up by professionals, and a live audience, buzzing with excitement, was waiting for her in the studio. Although she was both nervous and excited, the producers had gone over the show's logistics with her, preparing her for the critical moment that was coming up.

"They booked the flights, and they booked my hotel, and then as far as what I was going to wear on the show, they picked it out," Carlock said. "The hotel was amazing [and] was right in Times Square. I just really did get the royal treatment, and it was amazing."

The featured guests are faces that the public has typically seen on movie screens or red carpet events. Carlock is one of the only educators to be uplifted with a TV screen appearance. After being introduced with a smile from the host and cheers from the audience, Carlock spoke about her love of education. The news of Carlock's invitation spread throughout the LECC. To her staff members, the achievement was well-deserved.

"Seeing a teacher on a show like that be honored the way she was makes everybody feel good," LECC Care Facilitator Connie Brawley said. "It's one thing to have

fancy movie stars and singers and that on, but when you have a teacher up there who's getting the same treatment, I think that's the best compliment you could get."

Near the end of the show, Carlock was surprised with a free five-night Hawaiian getaway. This trip included a luxury hotel room overlooking the Hawaiian coast, a full service spa, a lava rock hot tub and access to award-winning dining. The live broadcast ended with a round of applause and a hug between Clarkson and Carlock. She then made her exit through the NBC gift shop, a landmark attraction for audience members and guests of the show to explore an array of unique merchandise.

"We got in the gift shop, and all the people from the studio audience were like, 'Can we take a picture with you? Excuse me, hi, Stacy. We loved you. You were great,'" Carlock said. "The next thing I know, there was a line forming of people standing there who wanted to meet me and take a picture with me, like I was a celebrity."

Carlock's experience with the production team of the Kelly Clarkson show is a reflection and result of one of her lifelong principles: spreading kindness. Throughout

her administrative career, Carlock has been dedicating her efforts into creating a space that uplifts employees. This is especially important during a time when educators face burnout and pressure in the workplace.

"There's more to just sitting in your office and

just sitting behind a desk," Carlock said. "You got to get out there. You got to get in those classrooms. You got to get to know your staff, and you got to make work fun. You got to show them that you love them and you want the best for them and you'll do anything to make it a great place for them to work."

Captions: Carlock poses in the lobby of the LECC. Students at the LECC made a variety of art projects that are hung on the walls of the lobby. "I've always loved being around kids, holding babies, so I knew my career was going to be doing something with kids," Carlock said. (on page 64)

Carlock skates with student Yaszir Olayiwola, age 3, guiding him around the LECC building. She readied him by tying his roller skate laces, clipping on his helmet and equipping him with a skate trainer. "Our curriculum is very play based, so we learn through play," Carlock said. "This place, to me, is all about fun. I've learned from the kids that they love to have fun. I love to have fun too, so I'm going to make this building a fun place." Photos by Vincent Hsiao. (on pages 64-67). ©

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