

## Elna Duffield, Financial Officer



Could it really have been 1975 when my association with Kirkland Preschool began? I was a mother of two children and the youngest had just turned 4. I was looking for a preschool for him and my neighbor, then part-owner and a teacher at the school, asked me to come and visit. It was much smaller at that time, only 9 children. I wanted my child to be an integral part of his own learning experiences. I was looking for a "hands-on" environment for my son with teachers that knew that the process was equally or more important than the final product. I wanted my child to see and experience a wide variety of life and learning that was "age-appropriate"...not a mini-kindergarten experience but an education that would instill in him a love of learning and a curiosity to explore and question the world that was opening up to him. That was the philosophy the school was founded on by its first owner, one that the staff in 1975 embraced and one that continues on to this day.

I was that mom who was available for all the field trips, loved to help in the classroom and interested in the curriculum and why the teachers had chosen it. When the owners of the preschool decided to go on to other endeavors, they took me out to lunch and asked if I would purchase the equipment and continue on with the preschool. I said, "yes", little knowing what a profound influence the school would have on me and how committed I would become to its existence.

I started the 1976 school year with 11 children and a friend to help me in the classroom. I also went back to school to earn my Early Childhood Education degree. Shortly after the school year started, my friend informed me that she wanted to start a daycare and left to set up her own business. Eleven children and only me....not a good ratio for the students or for me! One day, my sister-in-law, Carolyn Wirkman, a new mother on maternity leave from teaching elementary school, came by to visit the school I had been talking about. Once she took her coat off, she never left and it was definitely one of the best days of my life! We have worked as partners and friends since that day. For close to 18 years, I was the preschool director as well as a teacher.

Throughout the years, since that fateful day, I have had the privilege of working with an amazing group of teachers and had the opportunity to see the school grow, not only in size, but in complexity and skill, providing a sound and creative learning experience for young children. I am so grateful to these educators for putting their hearts and souls into making Kirkland Preschool an icon in the area and to the hundreds of families who continue to choose us for their children's beginning educational experience. It has been a privilege to work with exceptional teachers who make coming to work and teaching a tremendous pleasure.

In 1991, I retired from teaching at the preschool due to chronic sinus infections that were becoming a monumental health issue for me. Much as I loved being with the children, my body could not build up the immune system to fend off these infections. At that time, Carolyn efficiently took over the position as director and I moved into the background as the school's financial officer and director of the school's board. In 2001, I took on the position of General Contractor for the remodeling of our current facility. Although, I am not in the forefront with the students, I love keeping up with all that is happening with the preschool. The school, students and teachers will always be a part of me. I am proud to have been involved in the development of the school and its place in the Kirkland community.

- Married since 1966 to Larry Duffield.
- Two sons – Steve and Mike.  
(All 4 of Steve's children attended Kirkland Preschool and Mike's would but he lives in Leavenworth, WA!)
- Resident of Kirkland since 1971.
- Active with Seattle Children's Hospital both as a Trustee for 12 years and with several guilds.
- Enjoys family, friends and travel.