



ANTIGUADOORS.COM
925.283.8933
321 HARTZ AVE, SUITE #5, DANVILLE, CA

Tinkergarten underscores outdoor exploration, one muddy step at a time

By Diane Claytor



Tinkergarten leader Eliza Becker (right) and her class watch a gopher come in and out of his hole. Photos provided

What toddler doesn't love making mud pies, splashing through puddles or crawling around searching for bugs or digging for worms? That's what an East Coast couple thought in 2010 when they founded Tinkergarten, a program of classes exploring the outdoors through activities that inspire, excite and educate kids from 18 months through 8 years. And that's also what Moraga mom Eliza Becker thought when she was looking for a high-quality activity for her young sons.

When Meghan Fitzgerald, an educator, and her husband, Brian, a developer of tech products, had their first child, they were looking for hands-on activities where parents and kids could spend quality time together, having fun and learning. They wanted play-based activities where kids could use their creativity, independence and problem-solving skills in an organic way. "Our goal was to take it back to the way it was when we grew up – get our children playing outside," Brian Fitzgerald stated in a recent interview.

Most children today are growing up in a world filled with a myriad of scheduled activities and probably way too much computer and TV screen time. The focus of Tinkergarten is to bring memorable, tactile and outdoor educational opportunities to both children and parents, Brian Fitzgerald said. "Our premise is that nature and outdoors are the ideal classroom...and the idea is to encourage kids to have fun, be social and develop various skills through activities from making mud pies to creating art using items found outside, like leaves and berries."

When Becker, mother of two young boys, saw an ad for a local Tinkergarten class, it "spoke to my heart," she said and she immediately enrolled her 2-year-old son. Unfortunately, the class was canceled the night before it was to begin. Disappointed, Becker, who felt the Tinkergarten premise "was so in tune with my values" kept looking to see if the class would be rescheduled. It wasn't. So instead, the former primary school teacher decided to become a leader herself. "The Tinkergarten program brings back that sense of childhood that tends to be easily lost nowadays," Becker explained. "I love the fact

that it focuses on nature and outside exploration and discovery."

Training was done online and included videos, articles and calls with both the founders and mentor leaders. In the fall of 2016, Becker began leading a Tinkergarten class for kids from 18 months to 5 years, meeting at Moraga's Rancho Laguna Park for 95 minutes every Tuesday morning.

The curriculum is well researched and well developed with an emphasis on child development, Becker said, but "there's always room and opportunity for me to add my own style and flavor." The kids are never told exactly what to do or how to do it. As the Fitzgeralds described it, "the leaders lead, not teach. This makes the classes truly about the kids and their own learning process." Becker enjoyed leading her group so much that she continued with both a winter and spring session.

"We give kids the opportunity to really welcome exploration," noted Becker, who added that there are many life skills that can be developed through this type of play, including communication, creativity and imagination, problem solving, teamwork and persistence and grit.

Describing one recent Tuesday morning, Becker explained the class was focusing on friends found in nature and getting the kids to understand what a habitat is and how different creatures live in different

habitats. The kids (called explorers) were sent on a scavenger hunt searching for live creatures and, with the help of their parents or caregivers (referred to as guides), they found all different types of bugs. "We celebrated each discovery," Becker said, "and we also talked about how these creatures have just as much right to live as we do so we're going to find them but we're also going to protect them."

Even with all the rain experienced this past year, Becker made every effort to continue unless there was a "torrential downpour," she explained. "The days it was sprinkling tended to be the most fun." Becker built shelters in the park with tarps so they had a dry space to retreat to when needed. But, she said, the kids wore rain boots, rain jackets and "we went out there and got wet, got dirty, got muddy. We found a lot of worms in the rain and the sensory experience the kids get from this type of play is tremendous."

"In today's world, there's often so much hesitation in allowing that type of free play," she said, "and we're trying to reverse that. There's a time and place to be clean and a time and place to get muddy. Tinkergarten is the time to get dirty."

Becker will again be leading a fall Tinkergarten program at Rancho Laguna Park starting Sept. 7. To sign up or learn more, visit www.tinkergarten.com.



A Tinkergarten student makes an animal shelter – for his stuffed animals.



Total Clean
would like to thank the following employees
Martha Beltran and Eva Garcia
19 Years of Dedicated Service!



When I say "good," you say "neighbor."
Now that's teamwork. CALL FOR A QUOTE 24/7
WE HAVE MOVED
Mike Rosa
Agent
925-376-2244
Insurance Lic. #: OF45583
346 Rheem Blvd., Suite 106
Moraga
P097314.1 State Farm Home Office, Bloomington, IL



Home Composting for Busy People
Reduced Price **\$72**
• Reduced cost compost bins
• Free workshops
• Vermicomposting & Bin Building Workshops
• CompostSMART Advanced Training
• Republic Services garbage bill discount
• Free guides and resources
RecycleSmart
Central Contra Costa Solid Waste Authority
www.RecycleSmart.org
Offer available to RecycleSmart residents within Orinda, Lafayette, Moraga, Walnut Creek, Danville and unincorporated Central Contra Costa County (Alamo, Blackhawk, Diablo) and residents within the City of San Ramon.

Moraga's commercial approval process

... continued from page A4

CPDs are allowed only within existing multi-tenant commercial centers, and can allow for a reasonable degree of infill development. Major changes would still require applicants to follow the standard Moraga process.

An ad-hoc committee composed of council members Kymberleigh Korpus and David Trotter started the conversation on Aug. 9 about the general parameters for the CPD, including outlining

the minimum size, and minimum number of tenants required. The planning commission and design review board will also weigh in on the discussion before the town council takes the final vote defining the CPD.

The committee leaned toward allowing only multi-tenant units to be able to become a CPD, while allowing single occupant buildings to join in an already approved district. The committee agreed that two

acres would be a good minimum size for a CPD.

During the first meeting, neither Jay Kerner nor a representative of the Bruzzone family was present. The objective is still to get the process of defining the Moraga CPD by the end of October. At that point commercial property owners can decide if this zoning would be beneficial for their centers.