

# Baby Gator Tales

Volume 2, Issue 1  
January 2011

Dr. Pamela Pallas, Director

## Director's Message



Three years ago, Dr. Patricia Snyder, at the College of Education, and I discovered that we shared a vision for an interdisciplinary collaborative that would advance the science and practice of early childhood care and education with a focus on health, nutrition, early learning, family support and intervention for children with special needs. We are pleased to announce the creation of the Center for Excellence in Early Childhood Studies.

Working together, early childhood professionals and advocates in the College of Education, College of Medicine, UF's Department of Human Resource Services and Baby Gator have developed a model training, demonstration, and research concept where local, state and national partners will work collaboratively on behalf of children and families. The next step is to build a state of the art facility that will house another Baby Gator center and also provide office space for faculty and researchers, classrooms for UF students studying young children, clinical space for physicians, dentists, nurses and therapists in training, observation and data collection rooms, as well as meeting space for families.

The Center for Excellence will enable Baby Gator to expand the services we offer and partner with many more individuals and departments across UF and early childhood professionals across the nation. We are excited about our newest plans. We will keep you updated as we grow!

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## Lesson Plan Themes

### January

Ice Ice Baby:  
Exploring All Things Cold



### February

All You Need Is Love:  
Investigating Feelings and  
Building Relationships



### March

Marching Through Literacy:  
Exploring Literacy and  
Language Development



## Tiny Gator / Little Gator Activities - Village Drive Center

Greetings from Tiny Gators!

We would like to welcome our two newest babies, RJ and Hayden. Even though they are the two youngest friends they are growing fast! Their smiles show they are happy here!



We all enjoyed our Thanksgiving feast even though some of the babies slept through it!! So much effort was put into the special event; it was nice to see it all come together.

We would like to thank those of you who have donated things from our classroom wish list. We have received fresh flowers, glitter pens, ribbons and more.



All the children have certainly enjoyed PHIT Kids with Kelly. We crawl through tunnels, roll balls, and move to the music. Watching the babies as they grow and develop more skills is so rewarding! As we start the New Year, we look forward to new and exciting activities. Drop by anytime to join in the fun!!

Tiny Gators Teachers,  
Pat and Robin

Hello from the Caterpillars!

This has been an exciting school year for the Caterpillar class. We welcome our new friends Alexander and Arnav to our room. Arnav is brand new to Baby Gator and Alexander comes to us from the Tiny Gators class.

We had a blast at our Fall Festival in October. The children especially enjoyed our sensory tables. Quite a few were covered in goo!



In November, we all enjoyed making place mats for our Thanksgiving Feast using a corn cob, paint, and a turkey made from the children's hand prints.



We would like to thank our parents for coming to our Fall Festival and our Thanksgiving Feast. Our parents' support is greatly appreciated.



We had a number of special holiday projects in December. The children had a great time painting and decorating holiday ornaments for their mommies and daddies.

Caterpillars Teachers,  
Lisa, Kristie and Mandy

Hello from the Butterflies classroom!

The Butterflies classroom did some wonderful things in October with our "Falling Into Fall" theme. We explored the inside of a pumpkin, played with creepy crawlies, and had our fall festival.



During the month of November we explored things that fly in the air and blow in the wind such as kites, kazoo's, balloons, and wind chimes. We also had a very delicious Thanksgiving Feast!



We learned in December about the music and holidays in the Caribbean, Europe, the U.S. and Latin America. We explored different instruments such as xylophones, maracas, and banjos. We also went caroling to each of the classrooms at Baby Gator and hosted our annual "Holiday Party".

The children made ornaments and presented them to their parents at the party. Each parent was grateful for their child's gift and it was nice to see the joyous smiles on their faces!



Happy New Year from the Grasshoppers Class!

In October we talked about the change of seasons, fruits and vegetables, and hibernating animals. We also had a Happy Haunting Harvest celebration of fun, games and activities.

During November we explored aviation, learning about flying machines and flying animals. We also talked about being thankful and doing kind things for others. We had a joyful Thanksgiving Feast with our families and would like to thank Mr. Steve for all his hard work in preparing the wonderful food.



In December we listened to and explored world music as well as percussion and keyboard instruments. Ms. Kelly taught us all about dairy products. We "milked" a cow and made butter! It was "udderly" delightful!

We ended the month with a Winter Wonderland celebration for our families and friends.



## Growing Gators / Future Gators Activities - Village Drive Center

### Growing Gators

Children in the Growing Gators classroom were very busy this fall learning about things that fly and creating their very own flying objects. We took a sun-drenched walk to the University Farm to explore how many fruits and vegetables are grown. What a great learning experience that stimulated their curiosity and generated many questions!



As the season progressed, we learned to appreciate and give thanks for the people and things in our lives.

We shared and enjoyed a wonderful Thanksgiving dinner with family and friends in our classroom - a delightful experience for our Growing Gators.



Thanksgiving Feast

In January, the Growing Gators will be exploring all things cold with the lesson theme of "Ice Ice Baby". Brrrrrrrr !!

Growing Gators Teachers, Ashley, Dorothy, Stephanie and Susan

### Future Gators

The winter holidays were fun and educational in the Future Gators classroom. We celebrated Thanksgiving by singing songs such as "Over the River and Through the Woods" and "The Thankful Song" for our families who came to enjoy a Thanksgiving lunch with us. We had a wonderful turnout and met many new friends.



### Thanksgiving Feast



Our students also enjoyed learning how families around the world celebrate the holidays of Eid and La Posada.

In early December Ms. Pam visited our classroom to read stories about Hanukkah and share potato latkes with the class.



The Future Gators took a fun-filled field trip to the U.F. Human Resources department to sing seasonal songs for Christmas and Hanukkah. Everyone then had a great time during our Winter Holidays program as we sang for our families and enjoyed having them visit us for lunch.

For the second time, Baby Gator participated in the "Warm & Fuzzy Holiday Jammie Drive", which donates pajamas to children in need. Storm and Chris of 98.5 KTK came to visit and picked up the donations. Future Gators sang holiday carols for the broadcasters outside of our building!



## Upcoming Events/Closings at Village Drive

- ◆ Baby Gator Village Drive Center reopens January 3, 2011
- ◆ UF Spring Classes begin January 5, 2011
- ◆ CLOSED Monday January 17, 2011 Martin Luther King Jr. Holiday

Note -  
Baby Gator is **OPEN** during Spring Break March 7-11



## Food For Thought

by Steve Covolo



We continue to make strides in our food program here at the Village Drive location of Baby Gator. I am close to providing 100% I.Q.F. (individually quick frozen) vegetables for our friends. This is a marked improvement over the use of mostly canned vegetables, since canned vegetables are cooked once during the canning process and then the product has to be cooked again before serving. Most if not all of the nutritional value of the canned vegetable is lost by the second cooking process.

I.Q.F. vegetables are picked at their peak of ripeness and then quick frozen to maintain that quality and integrity. If at all possible, always try to buy frozen vegetables - it's a better quality product and is nutritionally better for you, too. In the future I would like to use 100% fresh fruits, yet price and storage are still obstacles. However, we are trying to use more fresh fruit whenever possible.



At our monthly Food Committee meetings we critique the current menus, ask for input from our teachers, and discuss how the children are enjoying the menu selections. We will continue to add some new items for variety, will utilize seasonal fruits and vegetables, and will remove some selections from the rotation that the children just don't seem to care for. With the cooler weather you will see some soups and stews on our menus.



I'd like to thank all the parents that have approached me and thanked me for all the effort we've been putting into our food program here at Baby Gator at Village Drive.

It's nice to know that its working and the end results are children are eating better and making healthier choices.



## Pajama Drive



With your generous support, Baby Gator collected and donated 149 pairs of pajamas to KTK's "Jammie Drive" again this year to benefit the homeless and needy children of Alachua and Marion Counties. Thanks for helping make this drive a success!

## GOING GREEN

by Nika Lorenz



In support of the University of Florida's vision of sustainability, Baby Gator has been focusing on "going green" in a number of areas.



We have placed recycling bins in the classrooms for paper and the teachers have been encouraging the children to participate in the recycling process. Baby Gators are learning to recycle and are getting into the habit of recycling their paper instead of throwing it away.

- Every ton of recycled paper saves enough electricity to power a three-bedroom house for an entire year. (Liveearth)



Baby Gator also recycles cardboard, aluminum cans, and milk jugs. Children get to take out an empty jug of milk to the recycle bin and they love being part of this initiative!

Baby Gator teachers also make it a point to turn off lights when the class goes outside. The children are learning the importance of keeping our planet clean.



Please continue to teach and practice recycling at home.

## From the National Safety Council

Did you forget something?

Nearly 70% of children left in vehicles are left by a caretaker. Maybe it's an overworked parent who forgets to drop off their child at daycare, or a relative who thinks the child will be okay "for just a few minutes".



Another 18% of kids crawl into the vehicle themselves.

- ♥ Put something you need on that trip in the backseat (a purse or briefcase) or place a stuffed animal in the front seat to remind you the child is there.
- ♥ Use drive-through when possible (the bank, dry cleaners, library, restaurants)
- ♥ plan extra time into your pick-up/drop-off routine to bring all children inside with you.

**Look Before You Lock.**

**Check the car seat every time you leave the car.**

# Tiny Gators / Little Gators Activities - Newell Drive Center

## Tiny Gators

In October, Tiny Gators explored fall leaves, listening to the sounds they make, and looking at the different colors. We also had fun painting with fall colors to make falling leaves of our own, painting with apples and playing with pumpkins! We would like to thank the families who came out to make the Fall Festival special! The children enjoyed dressing up and playing with their friends outside.



In November we took advantage of our wonderful weather and explored our outside environment. We went on plenty of walks and even enjoyed visiting the stadium! In preparation for Thanksgiving we showed the children pictures of their families and talked about what makes a family special. The children enjoyed making their handprint turkeys and exploring and feeling feathers!



In December Tiny Gators explored all aspects of music using drums, shakers, and bells to make music. When the chilly weather moved in, we also worked on a snowflake project with the children!



Soon you will be noticing some exciting changes in our classroom! With our babies quickly starting to move and cruise we will be getting some new furniture and toys to meet their needs.

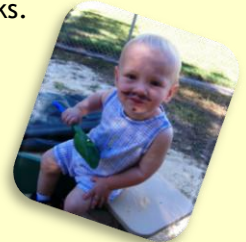


We would also like to congratulate Ms. Rosemeri on her recent marriage!



## Little Gators 1

The Little Gators had great fun in October with face painting, costume dress-up and color mixing. We also spent some quality time outdoors on leaf nature walks.



The children made handprint turkeys in November and enjoyed having their parents spend time in the classroom for the Thanksgiving feast.

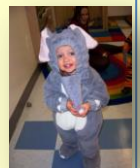


We made and played musical instruments in December as we explored all aspects of music.



The favorite book these past few months has been "Duck and Goose Find A Pumpkin".

Our children have learned many new skills including how to scoot forward in their chairs and how to drink out of a cup without a lid!



## Little Gators 2

Our classroom has been very busy with great activities this semester. We have enjoyed Farmer Day with a Hoe Down, Hay Rides and scarecrow making.



For Halloween we had pumpkin carving, a visit from the Pumpkin Fairy, a costume parade, and a Pirate's adventure on the "Shipwrecked Fancy."



We had a pajama day where all of our friends came to school in pajamas!

Fun was had by all when Cookie Monster spilled his cookie jar on our playground and we helped him find all of his cookies.



Our parents joined us for a special trip on the city bus to the Butterfly Museum and for our Thanksgiving luncheon.

Celebrations and music around the world were the focus of December with culture, food and traditions being enjoyed by everyone.



## Upcoming Events/Closings at Newell Drive

- ◆ UF Spring Classes begin January 5, 2011



Note:  
The Newell Drive Center will be open January 17<sup>th</sup>, Martin Luther King, Jr. Day.



"Adults are obsolete children."  
Dr. Seuss

### Love Cookbooks?

Purchase a copy of the Baby Gator International Cookbook for interesting international recipes provided by Baby Gator parents, teachers and staff. The cookbooks are \$10 each and are available in the main office. They make great gifts, too!

## Growing Gators Activities - Newell Drive Center

The Pumpkin Fairy visited our classroom in October. We all sang songs and played with pumpkin puppets. What fun!



The Growing Gators have had so much fun learning about the meaning of Thanksgiving.

We read the story *Stone Soup*, which is about a group of villagers who learn that life can be much better, and tastier, when they work together rather than individually. We made our own pot of stone soup with each class contributing something to make the soup delicious. There are many versions of this recipe - but one is shown below if you want to make some at home as a family project.



Miss Melinda showed the class how to make bread in her bread machine. She also had a machine called a mill that she used to grind up the whole wheat berries into flour. The children helped measure the flour, honey, eggs, flax seed, yeast and water. It was a fascinating process and the children thoroughly enjoyed the learning experience and the delicious, nutty flavor of the bread they made together.



In December, we learned all about music by experimenting with sound and making our own instruments while learning about the cultures in which the instruments originated.

We made maracas from Mexico, Didgeridoos from Australia, African drums,



and Native American Rainsticks.



### STONE SOUP Printed from COOKS.COM

- 3 clean stones
- 3 stalks celery
- 2 lg. carrots
- 2 med. onions
- 2 med. potatoes
- 3 med. tomatoes
- 1 bay leaf
- 1/2 tsp. basil, thyme, marjoram
- 1/2 c. parsley
- 1 1/2 tbsp. salt
- 1/2 tsp. pepper
- 1/2 c. rice



Read the story *Stone Soup*. Wash hands. Everyone can chop or measure something. Put in a large crock pot. Cover with water. Cook 2 to 3 hours on high. Remove bay leaf before serving.

### Sautéed Corn, Scallions and Bacon from Chef Steve Covolo

- 6-8 bacon slices
- 3-4 cups corn kernels, frozen or freshly cut off the cob
- 1/2 teaspoon red pepper flakes
- 1 garlic clove, minced fine or pushed through a garlic press
- 2 tablespoons butter
- 3 scallions, sliced 1/4", white and green parts



Variation: add 1/2 cup diced green or red bell peppers in step #3

1. In a medium sauté pan placed over medium-low heat, place sliced bacon and cook until crisp. Remove bacon from pan and drain it on paper towel. Set aside. Drain all but one tablespoon of bacon fat from pan.
2. Return pan to low heat. Add red pepper flakes and garlic, cook very slowly in the bacon fat until garlic is nutty brown.
3. Add corn, turn heat up to medium-low and sauté until tender and heated thoroughly through.
4. Turn heat down to low, add butter, scallions, and reserved crumbled bacon, stirring until butter is melted, about 1 minute. Salt and pepper to taste and serve immediately.

# PHIT for Success

Physical Healthy Interactive Training



by Kelly Jamison

Our little ones are not the only people to be getting healthy. All of our teachers have started on the path to a healthier life this past semester. For the staff and teachers we have the PHIT for Success program which works very much like the PHIT Kids program. Throughout the semester we had weekly healthy living tips, healthy recipes and Fresh Fruit Days in an effort to increase our fruit and vegetable intake, monthly drawings to win various health related prizes, and Friday Fun Nights. A local yoga instructor also came for a few weeks to help us relax and stretch with various yoga moves.



In September a number of our teachers participated in an Amazing Race to Fitness at Gainesville Health and Fitness Center. They were given a two week period in which they and a teammate could go work out for free and earn points for each time they visited the gym. The top three teams won a month's membership to the gym! In October we had Fight Fast Food challenge in which we couldn't eat fast food -- any fast food -- for the entire month. It was quite a challenge but it sure did save some money and some upset stomachs!

The middle of November marked the beginning of the Baby Gator Walk Off, Newell Drive vs. Village Drive. Each center was given some pedometers to take while the teachers walked on breaks or with the children. Each center really upped their walking and together we logged over 1,000,000 steps!

In December we had our first Healthy Home Cuisine with the talented Chef Steve. He taught us some great tips on healthy cooking and how to cut back on the fat in the good ol' comfort food of fried chicken and mac n' cheese! It was a delicious and healthy meal and we will definitely plan more Healthy Home Cuisine evenings for this year as well.



## Five Tips for Guiding Children's Behavior

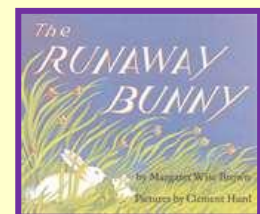
1. Promote positive behavior
2. Expect children to obey
3. Maintain fairness and consistency
4. Allow the expression of feelings
5. Think and plan for the future

From the National Network for Child Care  
[www.nncc.org](http://www.nncc.org)

## Books to read with your children - selected by the National Education Association



*The Very Hungry Caterpillar* by Eric Carte  
*Goodnight Moon* by Margaret Wise Brown  
*Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What do you see?* by Bill Martin, Jr.  
*The Rainbow Fish* by Marcus Pfister  
*Corduroy* by Don Freeman  
*The Snowy Day* by Ezra Jack Keats  
*The Runaway Bunny* by Margaret Wise  
*Guess How Much I Love You* by Sam McBratney



## American Sign Language

by Karen Shea & Keri Stacey



You may have noticed some of our Baby Gator children signing at our Holiday presentations this December! We are proud to see our teachers and children interacting with one another using American Sign Language along with our classroom curriculum.



Keri & June signing "more"

The children also got to sign and sing, "It's a Small World" for Storm and Chris from KTK when they came to pick up our pajamas for this year's pajama drive.

Ms. Keri recently completed a new hire orientation where she got to work with some of the new teachers and administration and was able to teach them about the sign language culture we have created here at Baby Gator.



"helicopter"



"more"

Ms. Keri and Ms. Karen are both looking forward to getting back into the classrooms to work with the teachers and students at both Newell Drive and at Village Drive in the spring.



"Daddy"



"water"








If you would like to explore American Sign Language at home some suggested links for you to use may be the Michigan State University's ASL browser which you can find at: <http://aslbrowser.comtechlab.msu.edu/browser.htm>, or you can use the ASLPro search engine at: <http://www.aslpro.com>.



Ms. Karen & Ms. Renee with children, signing "water"

If you have any questions or if you would like more information about our Sign Language Program here at Baby Gator please feel free to contact either Karen or Keri at Newell Drive. Happy Signing!

### Make time to Talk - Language Building Tips from the National Institute for Literacy ([www.nifl.gov](http://www.nifl.gov))

-  Mealtimes can be good opportunities for conversations with children
-  Ask questions that encourage the child to think - questions involving analysis, prediction, imagining things that could happen
-  Kneel or squat to be able to have eye contact with the child
-  Extend your conversation with the child. Conversations should go back and forth with each person responding to the other speaker at least a few times.
-  Expand on the child's language by repeating it with extensions (adding descriptive words, using words correctly that the child used incorrectly, adding to or building on the child's ideas).
-  Texts, such as books, posters, newspapers, and magazines provide shared topics to talk about. Read them with the child, asking questions and discussing them as you go along.
-  Act out stories with children, re-using words from books you read aloud with them.



# PHITkids

Physical Healthy Interactive Training



by Kelly Jamison

PHIT Kids had an awesome fall semester exploring the MyPyramid for kids and engaging in an assortment of physical activities. Newell Drive's VPK class took a PHIT field trip to Santa Fe College to watch the women's basketball team practice and participate in a little basketball clinic. It was a great time for the kids and the players as well!

Over at Village Drive, a few of the UF Volleyball players came to visit to show some of the classes how to serve, bump, and spike the ball. We have some volleyball stars in the making!

Our Tiny Gators and Little Gators have had a great time playing with balls of all different sizes, bouncing and rolling, shaking and feeling grains, and so much more. This spring they will continue to be exposed to a variety of activities.

This semester we will be learning about various other health and safety topics that affect children's lives. Here are a few of the topics that we'll look at:

- Sun Protection
- Oral Health
- Germs
- Fire Safety
- Street Safety
- Home Safety
- Relaxation Techniques

In addition to the regular physical education all of the children receive we'll also be taking some more PHIT field trips that will expose them to different ways we can be fit and exercise. The PHIT field trips we are looking at for the spring include visits to the track, tennis courts, baseball/softball fields, the O'Connell Center, and Ben Hill Griffin Stadium.

If you have any questions or ideas for PHIT Kids feel free to contact Kelly Jamison at [keljs@ufl.edu](mailto:keljs@ufl.edu). Keep checking your emails for news and information about PHIT Kids.

## Extended Hours Survey Results!!

Eighty one ( out of 121) families completed the Extended Hours at Village Drive Survey and the results are in!

- 83% of those responding would like the Village Drive center to have longer hours.
- Most preferred a 7:00am opening time and a 6:00pm closing time.
- Only 3 people needed the center to remain open to 9:00pm.
- 57 parents would like an occasional Saturday opening
- 54 would appreciate babysitting for a once a month "date night" for moms and dads.



In early January, Pam will be working with Phil and Jazmin to determine staffing needs and costs. We will plan to expand the Village Drive center's hours to 7:00am-6:00pm daily, beginning July 1. We will offer care for a date night around Valentine's Day.



Stay tuned for more information as the plans unfold. Thanks to all who participated in the survey. Baby Gator is here to serve children and their families and we appreciate your input!

## New Teachers

**Stephanie Loscalzo** - Growing Gators classroom at Village Drive



Stephanie joined Baby Gator in December of 2010. She has a Bachelor's degree in Outdoor Education and Environmental Interpretation from the State University of New York at Cortland.

During the past five years Stephanie has spent her time living and working throughout the northeastern United States and Southern Australia in programs such as Outward Bound Australia and YMCA Camp Lincoln. Stephanie has also worked with children through volunteering, working at nature centers, outdoor schools, preschools and being a nanny. Stephanie is very excited to bring her love of nature, adventure, reading, singing and storytelling into the classroom.



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[www.babygator.ufl.edu](http://www.babygator.ufl.edu)

*"If a child is to keep his inborn sense of wonder, he needs the companionship of at least one adult who can share it, rediscovering with him the joy, excitement and mystery of the world we live in."*  
*Rachel Carson*

## New Staff

**Jeff Jean** - Office Assistant at Newell Drive



Jeff joined Baby Gator in October of 2010. He is currently a senior at UF pursuing a Bachelor's degree in Psychology. While in college he volunteered with the children's ministry at local churches in West Palm Beach.

Jeff was born in the capital of Haiti and comes to Baby Gator from West Palm Beach, FL. He is a member of Chi Alpha Christian Fellowship at UF and in his spare time Jeff likes to volunteer in his church and spend time with his family and friends.

**Galen Schram** - Office Assistant at Village Drive



Galen joined Baby Gator in June of 2010. He is currently a pre-medicine student majoring in Biology at the University of Florida and also has a minor in Spanish.

Before coming to Baby Gator, Galen volunteered in the office in the Cardiovascular Clinic at Shands hospital. He also has experience tutoring elementary and middle school children as well as babysitting. In his spare time he likes being active by either running or salsa dancing.

The Campaign for Commercial-Free Childhood ([ccfc@commercialfreechildhood.org](mailto:ccfc@commercialfreechildhood.org)) is a national coalition of health care professionals, educators, advocacy groups, parents and individuals who care about children, and is devoted to limiting the impact of commercial culture on children. CCFC's authors are leading experts on the impact of media and markets on children and most are also parents. Here are some of their thoughts on television watching.

Children today don't have enough time, space, and silence for their own creations. Popular media characters impinge on daily life, cavorting on screens everywhere. Preschool children spend, on average, a staggering 32 hours a week in front of a screen outside of school. And too many are adding to that time in school as well. According to a 2009 study by *Pediatrics*, 36% of center-based child-care programs include television time, for an average of 1.2 hours a day. (NOTE: Not at Baby Gator!) In addition to the erosion of children's creative play, hours spent with screens are linked to childhood obesity, poor school performance and other major problems.

It's daunting to think about the money and power driving the push for a childhood characterized by all-screens-all-the-time. The balance in children's lives between screen time and time for anything else has gone spectacularly awry. It's urgent that we set it right.  
*Susan Linn, Ed.D.*

Email for Newsletter information:  
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