

# School cultivates crops, conscientiousness

At the end of a long, quixotic journey in search of wisdom, Voltaire's *Candide* finds inspiration on a small farm. The place is self-sustaining. Folks are happy and sane. Sweetened citron, pistachio nuts, and pineapples abound. "We must," he realizes, "cultivate our garden."

In the final scene, years later, our hero is at home lounging in the shade and eating homemade citron. He seems to have become almost evangelical about his mission. "We must," he repeats, "cultivate our garden."

At the dawn of the Industrial Revolution in 1759, this was good advice. Unfortunately, the ensuing exodus from farm to city indicates few people took it. Fortunately, two and a half centuries later, there's a school near you taking Voltaire's mantra seriously.

Camino de Paz is a small, farm-based Montessori middle school/high school located in Santa Cruz, about 25 minutes north of Santa Fe. Horses, sheep, goats, turkeys, and chickens are among the

teachers, as are the large greenhouses and manifold rows of vegetable crops, legumes, berry bushes, and fruit trees.

Students take regular courses in science, social studies, mathematics, English, and art, but much of their curriculum comes from hands-on experience associated with the farm. They are responsible for the farm's eggs, so science pops up when they consider the physical needs of their large flock. Social studies come into play when they look at the inputs necessary for a modern factory egg. Math is required in budgeting, pricing, collecting money, and checking the books. Clear, effective English is essential for good sales, and art skills come in handy when setting up an appealing farmers' market booth.

Started seven years ago by educator-farmers Patty Pantano and Greg Nussbaum, the school administration believes strongly in *Candide's* mission not only because living sustainably seems to be a moral thing to do, but also because it tends to make their students smarter.

"When you give adolescents a 'real world' context for learning, it engages them in a totally different way," Pantano says. "You see tremendous growth in their self-confidence, their problem-solving abilities, their academic work, and their creativity."

Speaking of the "real world," like any school Camino de Paz has to raise funds. If its mission interests you, you are invited to a "Food for Thought" benefit brunch at 11 a.m. Saturday, May 19 at Joe's Diner (in Rodeo Plaza at Zia and Rodeo). Tickets are \$55. Several community supporters are partnering with the school for this event: Cloud Cliff Bakery, The McCune Charitable Foundation and The Quivira Coalition's New Ranch Network, as well as Joe's Diner.

To reserve an Eggs Montessori with braised, homegrown field greens and fresh, local fruit cocktail, and to secure a chance to support one of the most worthy of local causes, call 986-2000 or contact Jeri Mark at [jeripmark@gmail.com](mailto:jeripmark@gmail.com).



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com. More information about the school and the brunch can be found at [www.caminodepaz.net](http://www.caminodepaz.net). Please feel free to call me, too. I'm a devoted member of the school's board, so in between garden chores, I'd be happy to answer any questions.

*Nate Downey (424-4444, [www.santafepermaculture.com](http://www.santafepermaculture.com)) is president of Santa Fe Permaculture, a locally owned landscape-design firm. His first book, *Harvest the Rain*, is scheduled to be published this year by Sunstone Press.*