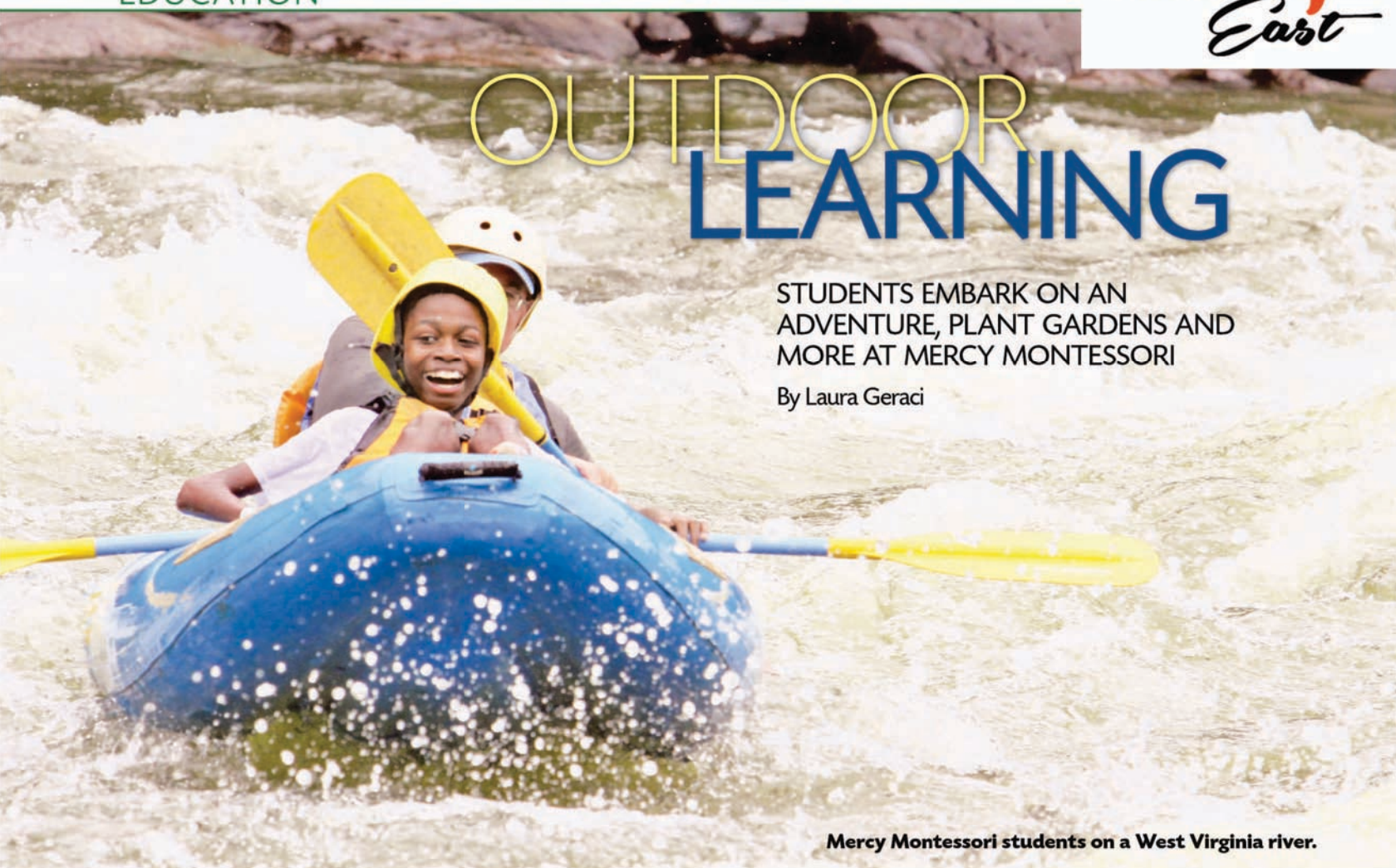


# OUTDOOR LEARNING

STUDENTS EMBARK ON AN  
ADVENTURE, PLANT GARDENS AND  
MORE AT MERCY MONTESSORI

By Laura Geraci



**Mercy Montessori students on a West Virginia river.**

**G**reater Cincinnati's first and oldest Montessori school provides a special educational and life experience for students in kindergarten through eighth grade.

So far this year Mercy Montessori junior high students have not only embarked on a community building trip but they have also begun to revitalize the schools Ecolab.

"We took the kids to Minden, W.Va. to Ace Adventures and spent three and half days there," says Lisa Klus, vice principal of Mercy Montessori. "The days had hiking, high ropes courses and white water rafting. The students had a packet of work, their agenda of what was going to happen each day and team-building questions to reflect on."

The Odyssey Trip took place during the first week of school and included 31 junior high students, three teachers, the vice principal and no cell phones.

"What really happens during the trip is the students learn how to work together through something fun and edgy," says

Klus. "Adolescents aren't fearful of much and it takes them to that point where they are a little fearful and they can learn something from their peers, and depend on them as well."

This was the first year that the school has hosted the Odyssey Trip and they plan on continuing it as an annual excursion for the junior high students.

"The kids had a great time and it is a wonderful part of their growth," says Klus. "A community emerges from the trip and sets the tone for the whole year."

The Mercy Montessori junior high students have also been busy with bringing the school's Ecolab back to life.

"It was very overgrown and a total disaster," says Klus. "The kids came up with a plan and they wanted to create a perennial garden; they even set up a compost system in August before the rest of the students came back."

The Ecolab includes a walkway, a stage and sitting area that will be developed to have science classes outside. The goal

is to create a project that will benefit students learning and create a calm environment for them to explore nature and biology.

The students plan on growing their own vegetables and herbs in raised garden beds in the spring and want to donate the Ecolab-grown produce to a local food pantry.

"The point is to grow these things, to learn, to do it on your own and share it with someone," says Klus. "We are not there yet but if you can see them and their excitement when they grow and work and share it with someone, it's awesome."

The school has also added two new teachers to the staff this year, Melody Smith and Jessica Dettmer. Both educators are Spanish instructors and are excited to bring the foreign language into the classroom.

"Previously we were using online programs and now we have teachers providing that content each week," says Gretchen Hooker, director of communications. "It's been a good addition to the curriculum." ■