

# MACOMB DAILY LIFESTYLE

## Albert Kahn-built Waldorf School a draw for Macomb County students



Mark Robson of Warren, Kathleen Marrocco of Chesterfield Township and Janine Schroeder of Mount Clemens, who are parents of students at Detroit Waldorf School, stand on the ramp that will make the building designed by famous architect Albert Kahn handicap accessible. The historic school was built in 1913. GINA JOSEPH - THE MACOMB DAILY

By [Gina Joseph](#), *The Macomb Daily*

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The Detroit Waldorf School is tucked among the artistic homes of Indian Village and hard to find, but parents do.

One of the reasons is the school provides an alternate choice of education that mirrors the stages of a child's development, along with a fusing of artistic elements, which in general reflects the development of humanity through history from our origin, far back in past times up to the present

The Waldorf or Rudolph Steiner education is one reason Macomb County parents are willing to make the 30-minute drive into Detroit every day.

*The second has to do with the building.*

“As soon as you walk into the school you know you like it but you're not sure why,” said Mark Robson of Warren, whose daughter attends the school that he once attended. “My mom taught here,” he added, while looking out the windows of a room in the school that serves as a lounge for parents. “I used to climb those trees in the yard.”

Being in the basement of the building one would imagine the room to be cold and damp but instead it was warm and inviting. Had an apple pie been warming in the oven one might have mistaken it for a neighbor's kitchen.

“It's all about design,” Robson said, of the historic school designed by world-renowned architect Albert Kahn.

There is lots of natural lighting and no dead color or sharp right angles. Instead the walls are covered with paint and plaster that comes to life whenever there is light and rather than barriers serve to carry on the flow from one room to the next.

“None of it is jarring to the senses but instead embracing,” Robson said.

“I've always felt welcomed here,” said Janine Schroeder of Mount Clemens, the parent of a fourth-grader at the school.

When she walks through the halls and down the ceramic and stone steps that have been worn down by the marching of little people who have attended the school over the years, she also feels a sense of pride knowing her son is part of a rich history.

Built in 1913, it is one of several buildings designed by Kahn including the Art Deco Fisher building, now a landmark and considered one of the most beautiful elements of the Detroit skyline. In 1928, the Fisher building was honored by the Architectural League of New York as the year's most beautiful commercial structure. Kahn also designed the Detroit Free Press Building, Edsel and Eleanor Ford House and several classic buildings at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor including Burton Memorial Hall and William L. Clements Library.

In 1966, after years of being an all-girls school, and empty, Rudy and Amelia Wilhelm purchased the building and opened up the Detroit Waldorf School.



*A child smiles for the camera during class at Detroit Waldorf School, a historic school tucked in a neighborhood in Indian Village designed by famed architect Albert Kahn. GINA JOSEPH - THE MACOMB DAILY.*

This past summer their children, Cynthia, Mark and Chris Wilhelm, presented the school with a \$50,000 grant to make the building handicap accessible. The work of constructing a ramp that not only blended into the landscape but complied with the Kahn's style was done by Detroit architect Anthony Morin.

"When I was first approached I felt honored, excited and intimidated," said Morin, who was born 60 years after Kahn erected the building and who studied architectural design at Pratt Institute and Cornell University. "I knew I had to do something great."

After consulting with a senior architect to ensure his renovations honored Kahn's historical design, Morin went to work. Among the summer renovations that have been completed is a wheelchair accessible bathroom and 60-foot-long ramp that not only blends into the existing landscape but becomes part of play for children spending time in the garden. To compliment the building's history and add even more nostalgia to the project he used stones salvaged from Atwater Street in Detroit, which was the first street to be paved, to border the edges of the ramp. Morin also chose the rocks because they're from Michigan, originating on the shores of Lake Superior and made of sandstone and iron. All of that makes the material a good teaching tool.

"I'm very happy with how it all turned out," said Morin, who was most impressed with how Kahn was able to design a building, with such grand proportions and still make it intimate. "It's exciting but inviting. It has the feeling of a home but it's an institution."

Just ask Kathleen Marrocco. She braves rush hour traffic from Chesterfield Township to Detroit, every day, so her son, Noah, 7, can attend the school.

"He wants to be the first one here in the morning and at the end of the day he never wants to leave," said Marrocco.

"It is like a second home," said Lily Mitchell of Warren and an eighth-grader. "I learned how to make chocolate here. I'm going to miss it when I leave."

[PHOTOS: TOUR OF DETROIT WALDORF SCHOOL](#)