

# suburbanlife

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**Innovate Academy,**  
an aptly named  
Christian school in  
Chadds Ford, shapes  
students into leaders,  
learners, and critical  
thinkers eager to  
make a difference in  
the world around them.

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Founder and Head  
Monica Guaglione  
(left) and Academy  
Dean Julia Barcalow



In her 25 years as an educator, Monica Guaglione, M.Ed., adored the opportunity to help students make strong connections with the world around them. At the same time, she felt frustrated by the lack of personalization in education. She dreamed of providing students with an educational experience that would hone each student's individual gifts in ways that would not only foster a lifelong love of learning but also shape him or her into a force for good in the world.

"In order to have that happen," she recalls, "I realized I needed to start my own school."

Her dream became a reality in 2018, when she founded Innovate Academy, a collaborative and Christ-centered learning environment in Chadds Ford, for students from prekindergarten through eighth grade. Innovate Academy offers a classical education that nurtures the whole child—spiritually, physically, and emotionally—through a combination of academic rigor, service learning, and Christian faith.

Innovate Academy has created a "head, heart, and hands" model designed to shape students into well-rounded learners and leaders; it strives to help students become critical thinkers, not just regurgitators of facts. The academy practices integrative learning that incorporates the likes of metacognition, logic, and Socratic discussion, as well as opportunities to engage with the community beyond the boundaries of the 24-acre campus.

To Guaglione, education should be a collaboration between students, educators (known internally as "mentors"), parents, and community leaders. On-campus instruction occurs Monday through Thursday, while Fridays are reserved for satellite instruction. Students also have opportunities to participate in field trips and community-based learning projects monthly. Partnerships with local businesses and nonprofits provide real-world experiences designed to help students learn, grow, and gain perspective about possible professions as they get closer to adulthood.

Innovate Academy currently serves 190 students, though the academy intends to expand into a leadership high school in the coming years. Students in pre-kindergarten and kindergarten benefit from the academy's embrace of the Charlotte



Mason method, which believes in the education of the whole person, not just the mind, and the Montessori model, which focuses on self-directed, hands-on, shared learning. The lower school (grades one through four) teaches core subjects such as history, literature, math, and science, while the upper school (five through eight) uses a collaborative approach to delve into core subjects on a deeper level. The entire curriculum is rooted in Christianity and character building.

our education in their classrooms to honor that and bring that out for each of them."

Guaglione agrees. In addition, she views each student as a "culture maker" who has the ability—and a responsibility—to contribute to the good of his or her community.

"How do we bring good to our world?" she adds. "How do we bring good to our classroom? Our neighborhood? Our families? ... Discovering each child's gift is very important.

What are your gifts? What are you passionate about? What do you see a need for that you can meet that no one else seems to be meeting the way that you can? Those are the kinds of questions we want to help them answer." ■

**Innovate Academy, an aptly named Christian school in Chadds Ford, shapes students into leaders, learners, and critical thinkers eager to make a difference in the world around them.**

by Jeneane Brown | photos by Alison Dunlap

# Renewing Faith in Education

INNOVATE  
ACADEMY

Innovate Academy shares its campus with Calvary Chapel of Delaware County. The close connection to the church enables students to develop a broad, non-denominational understanding of their faith. Guaglione adds, "Innovate represents the whole gamut of Christianity holistically, with various churches and Christian backgrounds, not just one view of it."

Guaglione describes each student as a "scholar," "creative artist" and "wellness entrepreneur." Students showcase their creativity in various ways, such as making films, writing stories, and participating in STEAM projects. Others find meaning through classes and clubs that offer opportunities to hone their skills in everything from organic gardening and the culinary arts to robotics and athletics.

Julia Barcalow, Ed.D., who joined Innovate as a middle school teacher and creative arts director, stepped into the role of academy dean last year. Barcalow also uses her theatrical experience to help students produce memorable stage performances. Innovate's after-school drama club, The Muses, stages three major performances each year that involve the entire school community. The most recent production: a contemporary fusion of the L. Frank Baum novel, *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, which included songs from *The Wiz*, *Wicked*, and the 1939 motion picture inspired by Baum's novel.

"The major part of the head, heart, and hands model is looking at each of our children as the unique individuals they are," she says. "From there, our goal is to find ways within