

73 The Other Blawenburg Village

By David Cochran

Do you know that there is another Blawenburg Village? Some might call it the other Blawenburg Village, while others may call it Blawenburg Village Jr. This village is right in the heart of the historic Blawenburg Village, but there is nothing historic about it or those who use it. This village is part of the playground at Blawenburg Village School (BVS), and the kids who populate it just call it fun!



Like so many ideas, the preschool village emerged out of necessity. It seems that a storm came along last year. Like the big bad wolf of three little pigs story fame, it huffed and puffed and blew their favorite playhouse down. In addition, the sandbox had to be closed because of Covid. BVS Director Angela Wright found herself looking for a new activity to fuel the children's imaginations on the playground. She and the teachers began asking the parents if they had playhouses to donate, and before long, they had several donations. One of the teachers, Maureen Boyer, suggested that they could have a village if they got enough houses. At a BVS board meeting, Pastor Jeff Knol of the Blawenburg Church, which sponsors the school, suggested that their burgeoning village could be named Blawenburg Village. Before long, the one playhouse had become many, bearing names like Post Office, Bakery, Townhall, Diner, and Fire Department.



*Children have fun using their imaginations
in their Blawenburg Village.*

Like the pre-Covid sandbox, the village doesn't need a map or any directions. The two-to-five-year-olds know just what to do. At the Post Office, they can pretend that pieces of mulch are letters to put through imaginary mail slots. At the Bakery, they can buy a pretend-cookie and pick it up at the Covid-inspired take-out window. At the Firehouse, they can wait for a fire call and then rush to put it out. There is no end to the creative ways the preschoolers use the village.

"The idea is that the children can let their imaginations go and be creative with it," Director Wright said. There is no fixed curriculum for the small village, but the way the kids interact with it is no accident. The design is subtle. What looks like free play, is really the "work" of preschoolers. It's how they learn. By interacting with others in creative ways, they are building communication and social skills that will pay dividends as they mature.



There is a special stop in the village that serves a practical purpose. The BVS Car Wash is near the boardwalk that encircles one side of the property. Many years ago, a local scout built the first part of the boardwalk as part of his Eagle project. It was expanded as part of another Eagle project. Today, it is used for the BVS vehicle fleet, which includes tricycles, large toy cars, scooters, small trucks and other preschool-size vehicles. Like the rest of the village, the boardwalk and vehicles are meant to fuel the imagination. But, Covid brought on a new challenge. The teachers needed a place to clean the vehicles after they were used. What better place to go than the car wash!

The BVS teachers and their director work hard to keep BVS safe while keeping the activities fun and creative. There are over 60 children attending this Christian school this year. Covid has presented many challenges to the school. Activities have been changed or limited. Children and teachers still have to wear masks, distance themselves and be aware of other Covid restrictions. Despite these challenges, BVS has stayed open throughout the pandemic while meeting State guidelines when many schools were remote.

When it comes to success, strong leadership and a good staff matter. BVS has the key ingredients for success in place, and the children are flourishing. That small village within a village speaks volumes about

the experiences the children are having as they prepare for the learning opportunities ahead.



Kindergarteners Teach Us about Kindness



The Kindness Turkey

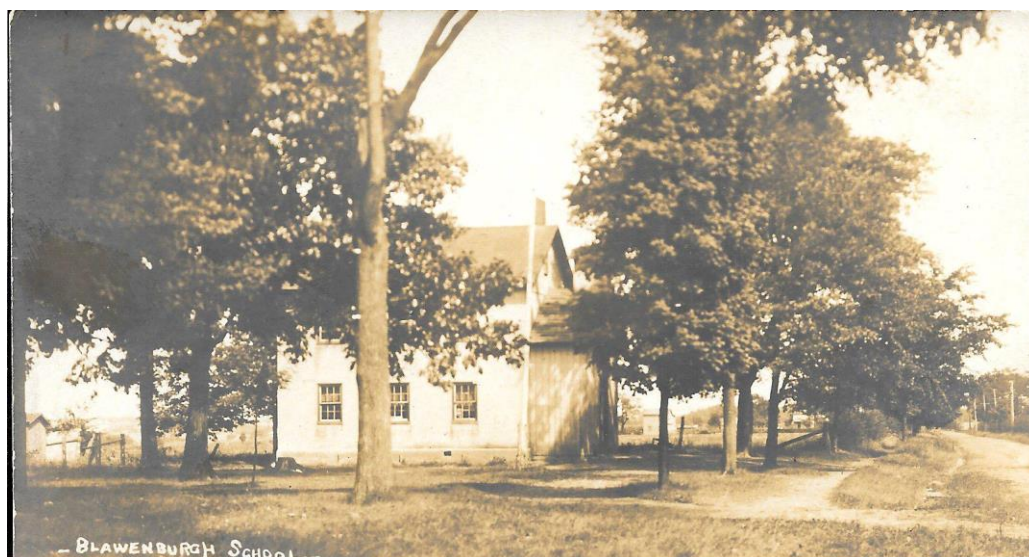
For Thanksgiving this year, the BVS students in the kindergarten class brainstormed ways to be kind to others. Angela Wright captured their ideas, wrote them on the feathers of the large Kindness Turkey above and posted it in the Turkey Museum with other seasonal artwork the children had created. The ideas they came up with would also work wonders for adults.

1. Give cards to people.
2. Help the community.
3. Help people NOT to be mean.
4. Help friends to be kind.
5. Say "I love you."
6. Help friends.
7. Try to give friends ice cream.
8. Give poor people food.
9. Give poor people things that will help them survive.
10. Show people tricks that they like.
11. Be nice to friends.
12. Help friends feel better at school if they are sad.
13. Give people candy.
14. Play tag with someone.
15. Share snacks with friends.
16. Give people books.
17. Play with friends.
18. If a friend has a boo boo, put lotion on it.
19. Give friends a toy to share.
20. Pick flowers to give people.
21. Give hugs.
22. Give kisses.

About the Director

Director Angela Wright began as an assistant teacher at BVS in 2010. She became a full teacher in 2012 and began her directorship in 2018. BVS has a strong educational philosophy and enacts its beliefs well. She has built on a solid base to further the school's good reputation. Eager to learn more, Angela is enrolled in the Master's program at the School of Education at Rutgers. Her program, *Learning, Cognition, and Development*, will undoubtedly help her generate new ideas for BVS in the future. She lives in Hillsborough with her husband, Dana.

Her daughter, Victoria, is a student at Rutgers, and her son, Anthony, will graduate next June from St. Joseph's High School in Metuchen.



Blawenburg School circa 1900



Today

Interesting Facts

1. The BVS building is the former Blawenburg School, which was built in 1850 and is on the National Register of Historic Places just as the Village of Blawenburg and Blawenburg Reformed Church are. It

remained an elementary school until 1925, when a new school was built just west of the church to accommodate the growing population. (See *Blog 53: Three Schools of Blawenburg.*)



2. After 1925, the school became a building for church meetings, Sunday school, and special events until Cook Hall was built in 1959.
3. It served as the home for Rock Brook School, which helped children with communication needs, for 20 years. Rock Brook School is still located in Montgomery Township on Orchard Road.
4. Blawenburg Village School opened in 1999 and has operated continuously since.

Credits

Information

Interview with Angela Wright.

Cochran, David W. *Blawenburg Reformed Church, 1832-2007, 175 Years of Faith and Hope*. Blawenburg, Blawenburg Reformed Church, 2007.

Pictures

Welcome to Blawenburg Village School – D. Cochran

Children playing in village – Melissa Orbe

BVS Car Wash – D. Cochran

Kindness Turkey – D. Cochran

Blawenburg School 1900 – from postcard

Blawenburg School today - <https://www.blawenburgvillageschool.com/>

BVS logo – BVS

Village Schoolhouse sign – D. Cochran

Editor—Barb Reid

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