



StyleBlueprint

CONNECTING WOMEN TO THEIR COMMUNITY



Academe of the Oaks - Eva Handschin

October 2016

StyleBlueprint Atlanta

Circulation: 300,000 unique visitors a month

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Eva Handschin: FACES of Atlanta

October 16, 2016 - [Melanie Preis](#)

Though not an Atlanta peach by birth, Eva Handschin is doing her part to educate our city's rising young peaches to find their voices and be responsible, civic-minded citizens. After moving to Atlanta from Switzerland with her husband and four children 16 years ago, Eva helped create Georgia's only [Waldorf high school](#), [Academe of the Oaks](#). This Swiss educator with a Southern twist is all about preparing students, as well as discovering all the great gems in art, food and culture Atlanta has to offer. Get to know Eva Handschin, today's FACE of Atlanta!



Academe of the Oaks is a green school focused on experiential and service-based learning, including environmental sustainability. Why is it important to teach children about their impact in the surrounding world?

It is important to connect young people to the community and the environment and to give them real experience with environmental and social issues so that they can have a real relationship with the planet and work to solve the problems we have. We want our students to give back to the community in which they live, to develop compassion for others and for the planet. We want our students to feel they can make a real difference — and not to feel helpless.

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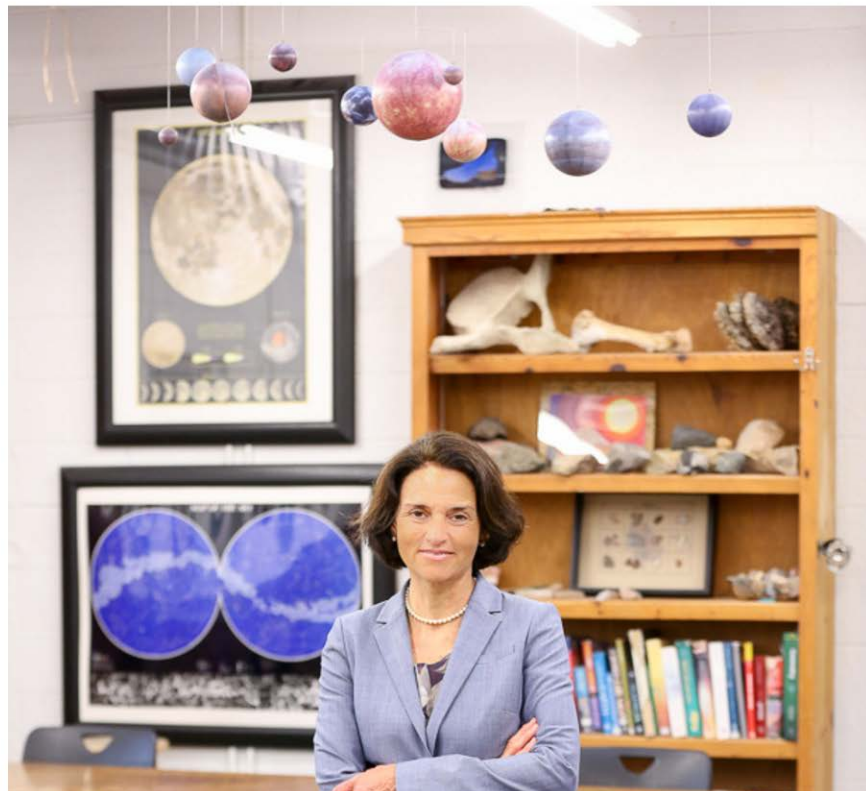


You, your husband and all four children are from Switzerland. How did you end up in Atlanta?

My husband's company brought us here.

What are some of the challenges you see Atlanta students face today?

Compared to Switzerland, getting around Atlanta is challenging — you need a car to go anywhere. I believe that this creates a dependency in students and they have a harder time becoming independent. This also makes it harder for students to socialize and strengthen communities after school.



What made you decide to become an educator? What's the hardest and most fulfilling aspect about helping mold young minds?

When I came to Atlanta, I saw that the city was missing a Waldorf high school. The Waldorf high school curriculum is really modern, reflecting the important aspects of contemporary pedagogy, including collaborative learning and inquiry-based learning. Waldorf education meets the students at their developmental level and helps them grow as people. I believe that a quality education is the most important opportunity for young people and that it really can change lives. If we want to make changes through the world, it will happen through education.

What is a **Waldorf high school**?

A Waldorf high school is a place for students to unfold their potential and find the path that is theirs. It is a place where students excel, ask questions, are curious, interested and eager to learn. Students are trained to think and see the whole picture. A Waldorf school prepares students to be open minded and flexible, to take initiative and to be civic minded and compassionate.

What are three simple, green things you do in your everyday life (that others can do) that impact our surrounding environment?

We recycle and compost, try to minimize our waste and keep the thermostat set at a reasonable level.



Academe of the Oaks is located in Decatur.

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This past Earth Day, Academe of the Oaks earned the honorable [Green Flag Award](#). Eva, her staff and her students were only the second school in Georgia to receive this recognition. In order to be eligible, Academe underwent a rigorous application process, including environmental audits, curriculum evaluation and community involvement. Winning this award shows the school's continuing commitment to sustainability.

What do you miss most about living in Europe — specifically Switzerland — and what do you think Atlanta does better?

[Atlanta's Beltline](#) is a wonderful part of the city; it connects communities together. Atlanta has tremendous opportunity and freedom. People have so many different opportunities for work, to create and just how to live their lives. What I miss the most about Switzerland is the beauty of nature there. It is amazing to be able to hike with the Alps so close by.

How do you know when you've done your job well?

It is hard to know that, honestly. But if our students and families seem happy and thriving, then I feel like we are on the right track.

Share with us a traditional Swiss delicacy. Is there anywhere in Atlanta that serves great Swiss food?

I don't really know of a place in Atlanta where I could get Swiss food other than in private homes. I do like dark chocolate — and the best chocolates are Swiss!

[RELATED: Did Somebody Say Chocolate?](#)

What's the one thing you hope every student takes away upon graduating from Academe of the Oaks?

That one human being can make a difference and that they are able to tackle challenges and think for themselves. We want them to feel that they are able to achieve their goals, to feel confident academically and socially.



Besides being an inspiring educator, Eva Handschin is an amateur foodie who loves Atlanta's ever-expanding food scene.

Where's your favorite green space in the city and why?

Piedmont Park is really amazing — there is so much culture and diversity there. But I really love to go to Atlanta Botanical Garden. It is wonderful that in the middle of such a large city, there are still places of nature where one can reflect and find beauty.

Based on your Swiss citizenship and job as an educator, choose your favorite literary character: "Heidi" or "The Swiss Family Robinson"?

Actually, my favorite character is Wilhelm Tell, or William Tell, a legendary freedom fighter from the Swiss struggle for freedom against the Hapsburgs. In the legend, he is forced to shoot an apple from his son's head with a bow and arrow.



What's the best piece of advice you've ever been given?

1. Do not judge other people; be tolerant.
2. Do not ever give up.

What are three things you can't live without, excluding family, friends and faith?

Books, flowers and good conversation.

Our thanks to Eva Handschin for sharing a little bit about her story, her work with young people and her testament that the only kind of chocolate we should be eating is Swiss!

As always, we want to thank [CatMax Photography](#) for today's lovely photos!