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The crowd cheers while a camper tackles the obstacle course set up for Rooper City and Country School Day Camp's Olympic Day events.



DICK KELLEY/staff photographer

Camp can be close but still challenging

By Kathy Parrieh
staff writer

IT'S THAT TIME of the year when kids look forward to a long lazy break from school. And parents look for ways to keep them busy for three months.

Day camps — always an easy solution to summer boredom — offer swimming, horseback riding, nature study and field trips.

But today's day camps also challenge youngsters to polish their talents or explore new skills.

This year, area kids can spend weeks acting, folk dancing, learning a language, perfecting the art of Chinese kung fu or finding out what it's like to be a curator at Henry Ford Museum.

There are nature camps, math camps, cultural arts camps, computer camps and sports camps offering everything from soccer and lacrosse to cheerleading.

"There's been an explosion," said Ann Sachs, director of the Rooper City and Country School Camp. This year the Bloomfield Hills camp has added a French camp complete with a French-speaking lifeguard to its special talent development offerings of music, dance, science, photography and woodshop.

"Children have much higher selectiveness now. They want to do things they'll get something out of. And parents want to spend their money for something worthwhile."

FOR SOME FAMILIES, day camp is a way to stimulate youngsters for a week or two during the summer.

"People are interested in embellishing the summer for their kids," said Jean Conway, who helped put together a summer camp directory for the Inde-

pendent Schools of Michigan.

"Parents want to enrich vacation for them and perhaps give themselves free time."

Cranbrook School, which has offered day camp and a theatre school on its Bloomfield Hills campus for decades, has added several summer programs in the last few years.

New this year are the Summer Jazz Ensemble, Lacrosse Camp, Soccer Clinic and Adventures in Dance. An All-Star Sports Camp was offered, but didn't get enough interest.

"People are more aware of the need to occupy youngsters constructively. They realize they can't sit around for three months and not be bored," said Fran Weaver, assistant to the director of special and summer programs.

One big factor in the day camp boom is the increase in dual-income families needing summer day care. The tight economy also may be keeping residents closer to home.

"WORKING PARENTS want to provide quality experiences for their youngsters but can only take them places on the weekend," explained Sachs, whose camp offers field trips.

"And they're not sending kids away for six weeks to camp. They're looking for things closer to home."

Many schools see summer programs as a way to help ease financial woes. Keeping buildings open year-round is a growing trend.

"All schools are using their campuses more widely these days. It benefits both sides," said Weaver, admitting the trend has resulted in much more summer-camp competition.

"Schools have learned their facilities should not stand idle. They also need income from other sources."

One benefit to the public is the opportunity to experience campuses they might not otherwise see. "You don't have to go to a school in the winter to partake of summer programs there," said Conway.

UNUSUAL DAY CAMPS offered this summer include:

- "Home and Family Life," "Hello, Henry Ford Museum and Greenfield Village," and "Trades and Crafts of America" give youth a chance to explore the Edison Institute, Dearborn.

- Chinese Kung-Fu is just one of the camps offered by Academy of the Sacred Heart, Bloomfield Hills. Other choices include Discover Summer, Summer Exploring, a drama workshops and clay studio.

- Folk dance will be part of the Oakland County 4-H Cultural Arts Camp, Springfield Oaks Park, Davisburg. Other offerings include music, drama, art, photography and printing.

- Computer camps are planned for Kingsbury School in Oxford, Oakland University and Madonna College as well as other area locations.

- Meadow Brook Youth Arts Programs offer dance, acting, mime, computers in music and other music offerings. Cosponsored by Oakland University and Oakland Schools, the half-day programs will be at OU.

- Sports camps are spreading, with a wide variety of offerings at Cranbrook, Detroit Country Day School and Oakland University.

- Life down on the farm can be explored at Upland Hills Farm Camp, Oxford.

- "Summer Camps 1982," prepared by The Parents League of Independent Schools of Michigan, is available at B. Dalton Bookstores and Birmingham Bookstore.



Computer camps put on by Oakland University's departments of math and engineering fill up so quickly there are only a few intermediate spots left.

ANN STRACY



DAVID FRANK/staff photographer

In its 41st consecutive season, Cranbrook Theatre School offers instruction, performance and recreation to students from third grade through college.