

Camp

Children explore science

By Louise Okrutsky
staff writer

IN ONE corner, paper pitcher plants caught fake flies with gusto. Across the room, a group counted tree rings and talked about watering their stale bread to make mold. At a third table, youngsters bent over their watercolor butterflies.

On the first day of Science and Nature Camp at the Farmington Community Center Monday, 19 youngsters ages 5-9 seemed on their way to becoming novice Daniel Boones. Conducted by the Living Science Foundation in Novi, the weeklong day camp mixes animals, nature lore and art projects aimed at educating and entertaining.

Michelle Horvath, one of the foundation's science interpreters, led her group in coloring cones of paper to resemble pitcher plants. To ensure that art imitated life, a paper fly weighed with a coin was tied to each pitcher plant. After learning that the plant attracts and "eats" flies, the campers began to flip the flies into their plants.

"I found a better way to flip it in," said Steven Schullat, 6, of Farmington Hills. As he vigorously flipped the fly in and out of the cone, Steve observed, "My fly's going to be very tired."

ACROSS THE room, interpreter Steve Brewer led his group in counting tree rings. When it became apparent to him that most of his campers hadn't learned to multiply, he gamely continued to estimate the tree's age out loud.

Meanwhile, Lillian Banta watched as her group carefully colored an outline of a butterfly. Before starting her family, Banta had been a high school teacher. After two decades, she has returned to work as a science interpreter for the Living Science Foundation. "Even if I was offered a job by a school, I don't think I'd take it," she said.

Two groups of six campers each and one group of seven were led by a foundation teacher and one high school-age helper. Two helpers, Samantha Rowland and Randi Ellsworth — both Warner Middle School students and members of Girl Scout Troop 541 — are working on their service badges.

Earlier in the morning, campers walked around the community center grounds in Farmington Hills learning to take a second look at nature.

Underneath all those leaves, each tree has a distinctive bark. To prove it, foundation science interpreters told each camper to touch the bark. Then, just as in blind man's bluff, the children were blindfolded and asked

to attempt to find their tree by touching it.

THROUGH THE week, foundation science interpreters will daily bring in six new animals, such as Cheech the Chinchilla. The foundation owns 80 vertebrates as well as a collection of small sea creatures.

When the Living Science Foundation returns Aug. 15-19 to the Farmington Community Center, it'll offer an Air & Space Camp complete with a portable planetarium. For details, call the foundation, 477-8401.



Andy Goldseig, 6, of Bloomfield Hills, reaches for a Salmon Crested Cockatoo perched on the shoulder of Steve Brewer, a classroom interpreter for Living Science Foundation.



Jeff Kohler, 8, of West Bloomfield, paints a butterfly with water colors.



Courtney Blachford (left), 7, of Farmington gets help from Randi Ellsworth, 11, of Farmington Hills, in guessing the age of a tree by counting the growth rings in the trunk.

Tally Hall goes shopping for national food chain

Managers at Tally Hall in Farmington Hills are hoping to revive diminishing sales at the specialty food center by negotiating with national food chains.

General property manager Kim Kain is trying to work out a new strategy to fill the 12 vacant spaces once occupied by individual or family-run businesses.

"We are currently 65 percent leased; the industry standard is 82 percent," Kain said.

Business failure and the desire to retire were among the main reasons tenants chose to leave, she said.

But opinions as to the cause of the two-year slump differ among restaurant owners, customers and others affected by the decrease in the food court's traffic.

"They are probably hiking up the rent, it's kind of the nature of the beast," said Rick Lampi, community development coordinator for Farmington Hills. "I'm going to guess that's the prime factor in why they (tenants) have to move."

"Our concern is that we want all of the city's businesses to thrive; you don't want an area to have a vacancy problem because eventually it will lead to neglect and vandalism, which isn't the problem right now," Lampi said.

Kain declined to comment on the increase in rent.

THE HONEY Tree restaurant, a tenant of Tally Hall since the mall opened in 1981, does very well, according to Kain. Owner Thomas Goulas, however, does not like the idea of bringing in a national name.

"National chains will kill the other ones — I don't believe in nationals," said Goulas, who owns five restaurants that are all run by members of his family. "Yes, the traffic of the mall is down; it's because it's not new anymore."

Goulas, a Greek immigrant, says that Tally Hall needs more variety and specialty food stores. He says that the reason for his success is that he built a large clientele that followed him after he sold his last restaurant, which was just a mile away.

Karen Russette, assistant manager for Haagen-Dazs Ice Cream Shoppe, disagrees with Goulas. "I think that our success is due to the fact that we're nationally known — that's why I think it's a good idea for Tally Hall to bring in nationals."

Kain said that a nationally sponsored name, such as A & W or Burger King, will generate more traffic, people will associate with it more easily and it will have a larger operating budget than the smaller, individually owned restaurants.

"It's a very tricky situation, though, because we can't bring in someone like Burger King that will compete with our less recognized tenant that also makes hamburgers," Kain said. "The tenant is protected by his lease — you have to wait for it to expire and we have a few that will expire in the near future."

ONE THING is certain: all agree that mall traffic has decreased and is showing in mall sales.

Lisa Cohen used to work for a health food store that moved out of Tally Hall last December. "It was always so slow, lunches didn't even get mobbed like they used to and all of the (vacant) spaces weren't inviting either," said the West Bloomfield resident.

"I think it was a little ridiculous to have a health food store in the middle of an ethnic fast-food heaven," Cohen added.

Kain said there are a few things they are planning to do to start attracting national names:

- Have tenants upgrade their menus;
- Remodel to suit the 1990s;
- Use advertising aimed at high school students;
- Keep up the quality level variety images;
- Bring in an orchestra on weekends in the outdoor court.

Cohen and sources who spoke on condition of anonymity have said that offers of six months' free rent have been made to keep present tenants from leaving and to bring in new ones.

the young individualists



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Thomas Goulas has operated the Honey Tree in Tally Hall since 1981.