

Youngsters, parents enjoy close-to-home arts camp

**Variety show
fitting encore to
summer program**

It's a lot cheaper than Interlochen or Blue Lake and not quite as pretty. But for youngsters who participated in the recent Summer Arts Camp at Warner Middle School, the venue made no difference.

That's because they found out that learning about music, art and dancing can be a rich, rewarding experience anywhere — whether within the walls of a basic school building or at a picturesque northern Michigan retreat.

Under the guidance of camp director Paul Barber, who is music coordinator for the Farmington district, kids entering grades three-eight enjoyed two weeks jam-packed with everything from molding clay into pottery to performing excerpts from a Broadway play to singing favorite songs with friends.

"It's a chance for young people, who may have a comfort problem going away from home, to have a chance to immerse themselves in art and music and still go home for dinner," said Barber.

To cap it all off, the 126 campers and their instructors (including teachers from the Farmington and Walled Lake districts) showed off what they learned to their parents, at a fast-paced open house at Warner July 24.

"Look around, there is so much happening in every classroom," said Barber, in his sixth year of running the camp. "The object of this open house is for people to be both entertained and walk out with a more profound appreciation for the arts."

That certainly was happening in the nearby gymnasium, during the musical theater session led by Janice Mammima, a teacher at Power Middle School who was participating in her first Summer Arts Camp.

Mammima, standing behind several rows of seated parents, offered some instruction and pointers to the boys and girls before a run-through of some vintage show tunes with dated lyrics such as "I'm going to wash that man right out of my hair" and "There is nothing like a dame."

"Remember to project your voices and articulate," she said.

Dreamy kids

With music playing from a nearby tape recorder, students followed Mammima's lead with some a pretty convincing song-



Summer sounds: Megan Bechwith plays flute in the camp's middle school band.



In step: Above, during an open house to cap off the Summer Arts Camp at Warner Middle School, youngsters in dance class perform for parents. At right, Rose Mehall plays cello in the string orchestra.



and-dance routine. They sang, whistled and moved freely about the stage.

During a pause before the next class, Mammima said the enthusiasm and hard work from the campers made the two weeks "a teacher's dream. They're on fire. They've been great."

One of the performers was 10-year-old Jon Black, a Kenbrook Elementary School student. His mom, Leslie, watched from the audience.

"Sometimes I think school is better than summer (vacation) because there's nothing to do," Jon said. "But with this, there is always something to do and a

chance to meet new friends."

He added, jokingly, that the girls in the session danced better than the boys.

Leslie Black, meanwhile, said she was enjoying the open house and thought students and instructors alike were having fun with the arts.

Down the hallway, campers and their parents collaborated on some still-life paintings, with guidance from instructor Jessica Halonen, working the camp for the fifth consecutive year.

"Everybody draw!" said Halonen, a graduate student at Washington University in St. Louis. The first step was for the

teams to

trace fruits and vegetables on a piece of paper.

Then, they had to apply the paint, which in some cases meant mixing various colors.

"Kids get out the primary colors and teach parents how to mix the colors they see on the object in front of them, only using yellow, red and blue," Halonen said.

Role reversal was fun. But she said campers also benefit from spending a lot of time doing

something they like — but have limited access to during the regular school year.

The place to be

"This is much more specialized than they'd learn in their one day a week of art class in elementary school," Halonen said. "And each teacher that's here is specialized. They get the benefit of a smaller class and really delve into one subject."

Barber said factors for the growing popularity of the program include cost and convenience. The Farmington camp is \$165, whereas someone could expect to pay more than \$1,000 to attend Interlochen.

And then there is the beauty of campers being near home.

Esther and Mike Weddell of Farmington like that part, as well as the fact their daughters (Carmen, 12, and Corinne, 10) get a jump on learning their musical instruments.

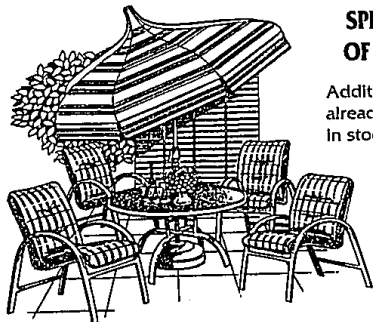
"They enjoy it," Mike Weddell said, in transit from one open house classroom to another. "They get to be creative, and a lot of their friends are here. It's a pretty good value."

Besides, said Esther Weddell, "We wouldn't send them away."



All in the family: Kelli Wallis shows a ceramic in the shape of a turtle to her mom, Carrie.

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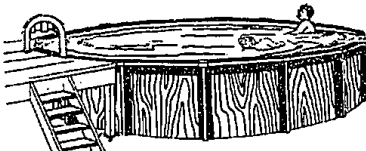
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