

How YMCA teaches kids country life

By SUSAN AVERILL

It is becoming an American doctrine to start your child out young in anything you wish him or her to excel in.

"For those parents in the Farmington area who want their youngsters to excel in camping, the Farmington YMCA is offering a 'Kiddie Kamp' for children ages five and six.

The camp is nothing new. It's been around for six years and has proved popular with parents who sign up their children for one or more weeks of the one-week sessions.

Camping experience isn't provided, per se. There aren't any overnight outings scheduled, and food is brought in sack lunches rather than cooked over a campfire.

STILL, THE KIDDIE Kamp accomplishes its fundamental purpose. "It is designed as a beginning camp for children to give them some outdoor experience. It's not camping in terms of what most people think of as camping. It's opening kids to a group-type outdoor experience," said Fred Lindholm, YMCA program director.

The children's outdoor environment for these experiences is the Farmington City Park at Shawassee and Power roads.

If it rains, one of the two camp staffers will leave a notice in the park advising parents that activities have been moved to drier quarters inside the YMCA building.

Most of the time, however, students pursue their arts and crafts projects for four hours under the sun in the park.

The program also gives children a head start in school.

"The projects involve crafts and art and other times what I would call media work. One day we'll have them experience coloring with crayons and the next day with chalk. One day we'll have them cutting with scissors and pasting on paper, and another day we'll have them working with clay," Lindholm said.

The program begins at 10 a.m. every weekday morning and continues until 2 p.m. Games are played and songs are sung throughout the day while art and crafts projects are scheduled mainly in the mornings.

AFTER EATING their sack lunches, the students have a rest period. Story time is scheduled after lunch has had a chance to settle.

Lindholm said between 10 and 18 four- through six-year-olds participate in the program each week, and more than 100 will have completed the program by the time it ends, Aug. 22.

There are two sessions still to go. Jackie Krause, 21, of Farmington is one of the staff members running the Kiddie Kamp. A senior at Oakland University, Ms. Krause is earning a BS in a new program called preschool education.

She has worked with Farmington children before and has three summers' experience with the Head Start program in the Farmington Public Schools.

Mrs. Debbie Fleck, a former Farmington student who lives in Southfield, is counselor for the program. She is also the instructor for other YMCA programs including gymnastics and women's fitness classes.

For students who have already completed the Kiddie Kamp program, the YMCA offers various progressive camp experiences. Next step up is a day camp for seven- through 12-year-old students.

Called Far-Oak Day Camp, it provides a broader range of camping experiences in a day's time. Students are bused to Camp Ohjysa near Holly for the two-week program which runs 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.

They learn to canoe, ride horses or learn archery. The last day of the program includes an overnight campout.

FOR THOSE MORE experienced campers, the YMCA offers a 300-mile canoe trip, backpacking and other programs.

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