Summer Camps Education & Activities

By Marilyn Campbell

Choosing a Summer Camp

Now is the time to register; many choices.

Many Options

Many ideas for summer activities

Avoid those dreaded words: I'm bored.

Many Ideas for Summer Activities

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One way that families can spend quality time together is by creat- ing art, said Dabney Cortina of the McLean Project for the Arts in McLean. In addition to summer camps, McLean Project for the Arts offers family workshops where par- ents and children create art to- gether.

"The whole process of creating art is important to a child's develop- ment and it's important to be in- timate and special with your parents and friends," said Cortina.

"Summer is a wonderful time for parents to get to know their kids and interact with them in a differ- ent way," said Garofalo, who lives in McLean.

One way that families can spend time and help children learn during the summer is to "Let them explore a yard," said Garofalo. "Kids gather the flowers, throw flowers for neighbors who are away." Garofalo said. "Kids gather the flowers and make a little flower garden." Parents can also tie in a service project.

"With parental approval and guid- ance, kids can also do dog-walking or water flowers for neighbors who are away," said Garofalo. For families who want to spend more time in nature, Lee Jannick, Ph.D., Professor in the College of Educa- tion and Human Development at George Mason University suggests the Manassas National Battlefield Park. The park, which is home to more than 150 species of birds, has been recognized National Audubon Society as an important bird area. "Our area has so much history," said Jannick. "Many of those places don't cost money but can immerse students in something educational, which is really critical." For parents who plan a rem- edy of indoor activities, specialty camps as well as parent-child ac- tivities are a worthy option. Three or two sessions of week-long specialty camps can add to a child's summer experience.
When summer vacation begins and school ends in a few weeks, learning doesn’t have to take a hiatus. Students can keep their academic skills sharp without entering a classroom or even sitting down with a pencil and paper.

Local educators say opportunities for reading, math, science and history skills are plentiful and none require that children set foot in a school. From a walk in the park to a trip to the grocery story, teachable moments are virtually everywhere.

“There are a thousand ways to do it, but reading is critical,” said Marjorie Myers, Ed.D., principal, Francis Scott Key Elementary School in Arlington. “I think the most important thing to do is read in a fun way. Read as a family. Parents can read challenging books to their children. Go to your local library and take advantage of fun activities there.

Some elementary schools encourage their students to read and discuss what they are reading with their parents.

“We ask kids to read and then have discussions with their parent about what they are reading,” said Blake M. Giliotti, staff development teacher at Potomac Elementary in Potomac. “We don’t ask them to do anything written because we don’t want them bored by school work during summer.”

WHEN IT COMES TO science, Len Annetta, Ph.D., professor of Science at George Mason University says he and his wife Jennifer spend a lot of time at the Smithsonian museums with their two children, Samantha, 13, and Joey, 11.

“We particularly like the Air and Space Museum,” he said. “It keeps them engaged in science. We walk around together and we ask them questions after we leave a museum. When they get home they get to go online and do more research on things that interest them.”

There are subtle science lessons to be learned even when taking a summer stroll. “We’re out for a nature walk and we see an animal or plant and we start talking about it,” said Annetta. “We also look at and talk about grasses and trees and animals.”

A shopping trip can also be an opportunity for a math lesson, said Myers. “Take your children to the grocery store and use actual money instead of credit cards, so the children can see a value for money and numbers,” she said. “Give children an allowance so they can make the connection between money and the cost of things they want to buy.”

This area offers an abundance of locations for history lessons. “I go out to the battle fields near Manassas,” Anetta said. “There are placards that help describe what is going on. There are a lot of local museums that offer the same opportunities.”

Keeping a journal is another way to keep skills sharp outside of a structured setting.

“Keeping a travel or camp journal is a fun and easy way to support academic skills,” said Benita Cathey, director of admissions at Grace Episcopal School in Alexandria. “A travel or camp journal reinforces writing, geography and social studies and organizational skills.”