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Great Falls Connection ● Camps & Schools

Ready, Set, Go

Now is the time to choose summer camps.

By **Hanna Kozlowska**

Families in the Washington area are known for procrastinating on camp decisions, said Greg Cronin, a camp consultant. Due to the job turnover and general population mobility in the area, many parents aren't sure what they will be doing during the summer. "There might be a change in administration, war, a job transfer, change in financial security," he said.

Not only do they make decisions later, but they also have a history of choosing shorter camp sessions. It was in the Mid-Atlantic that shorter camp sessions,

especially for resident camps, were started.

"While in New England or New York children would be sent to eight-week-long overnight camps, camps in the Mid-Atlantic had two-to-four week sessions," said Karen Rosenbaum, director of the TIC camp, a technology and athletics camp with locations in McLean and Bethesda.

"Camps in our area started out much later, and had a more leisurely pace," she added.

There are 49 day and overnight American Camp Association accredited camps in Virginia. They offer activities ranging from Photography classes with a Pulitzer

Prize winning photographer, inline skating with an Olympic champion to writing computer programs and creating Web sites. The trick is to choose the right camp for one's child.

"Camp has to encourage them, excite them, make them happy," said Bill Clement, father of Stephen, 12 and Charlotte, 9 who attend the Bullis day camps.

When looking for camps parents consider a variety of factors. Cronin, the consultant, lists the camps director, program and the child's friends as important determinants.

"The first thing [that I consider when choosing a camp] is a safe environment, the second is a social environment, and the third is whether the camp offers suitable activities for my children," said Clement, a stay-at-home dad.

Many parents treat camp as a form of day care for the summer. "Our [McLean] camp is a convenient place for parents who work in Tysons Corner, or in the city," said Rosenbaum, director of the TIC camp.

Phyllis Elperin, director of the Bullis School Summer Programs adds that the day care motivation is a very



Two actors rehearse in theater camp.



Counselor Samantha Poto helps camper Sophie McIntyre learn how to walk a tightwire in a circus camp last summer at the Bullis School.

Choosing a Camp for Your Child

The National Camp Association tells parents the following questions when selecting a camp for their child.

- What is the director's age and background? How long has the director run this camp?
- What are the camp's goals and philosophy?
- What kind of camper (i.e. athletic, creative, etc.) is most likely to have a good experience at this camp?
- What kind of facilities does this camp have and how convenient are they for the campers to get to?
- What is the schedule like? Is it a structured program or one that offers a lot of choice to the camper?
- What is the camper-counselor ratio?
- What kind of staff training is provided? Are there many members of the staff who formerly attended the camp?
- What percentage of campers return each year?
- What is the total cost of the camp including extra trips or family visits?
- What are the sleeping arrangements and what type of toilet and shower facilities exist?
- What is the swimming instruction program like?
- How does the camp ensure the safety and security of its campers?
- What is the food like and who prepares it? Can the camp accommodate special dietary needs (i.e. food allergies, kosher diet, etc.)?
- What is the policy about food packages, letters home, trips off site with family, etc.?
- What medical facilities are available and what medical staff is on site?
- Is there a refund policy if a camper leaves early?
- Will the camp supply references to people interested in its program?
- What happens when the weather is bad?
- What type of insurance coverage is at the camp?

See www.summercamp.org for more.

important factor for two working parent families, a common situation in the DC

area. Parents are also looking for a camp environment that

will keep a student's skills sharp.

"It is a long time between

Help Choosing

CAMP FAIR
Potomac School Camp Fair
Jan. 30, 1-3.30 p.m.
1301 Potomac School Rd., McLean

LOCAL RESOURCES

Fairfax County Camps:
http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/rec/rec_camps.htm

Town of Herndon Camps:
http://www.herndon-va.gov/Content/Parks_rec/Programs_and_classes/Camps/default.aspx

Reston Camps
<https://www.reston.org/ParksRecreationEvents/RACamps/CampPrograms/Default.aspx?qenc=HzT9ACzZbNs%3d&qenc=yC3nvofbR50eL4dBZ6rmHA%3d%3d>

Arlington County Camps
<http://www.arlingtonva.us/departments/parksrecreation/scripts/camps/parksrecreationscriptsampsmain.aspx>

Find Out More:

<http://www.acvirginiacamps.org/>
<http://dc.about.com/cs/familyactivities/a/camps.htm>
www.campparents.org

June and September," a parent once told Rosenbaum. Children lose the ability to focus on academics during the summer. "The first three weeks of September are spent on reviewing what the children knew in June," said Rosenbaum, a former school-teacher. "Depending on what the students have been doing during the summer, they pick up slower or faster."

Summer camp helps prevent learning loss in a variety of ways, says Cronin. Though many camps have an academic component, children learn even when participating in simple outdoor activities. "Most people would think archery is just shooting a bow and arrow,"


Cronin said. "But it involves listening, following instructions, hand-eye coordination, environmental range consideration, wildlife."

Some parents want to improve their child's academic skills more directly. Sean Davis, father of 14-year-old Kaylee, who has attended Bullis camps, wanted to "boost her writing."


"She resisted, as any teenager, but she took the class in addition to her art classes, which I felt was a good trade-off," he said.

Davis wanted his daughter to take a writing class after his experiences in county government, where he worked as a senior manager. "People's writing skills are

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Muslim Youth

After almost a decade of raising awareness since 9/11, groups are focusing on community among Muslim youth.

By Sofia Saiyed

After their last class on Friday afternoons, as other students rush home to start the weekend, a group of 20 or so Muslim students line up to pray together in a classroom at Chantilly High School. Male and female students line up separately according to Islamic tradition.

After prayer, students discuss topics ranging from how Muslim youth should treat their parents (with love and respect, they said) to biased portrayals of Muslims in the media and their reactions to events such as the Fort Hood shooting. By 3 p.m., most of the teenagers have rushed off to part-time jobs and to hang out with friends.

The Muslim Students Association of Chantilly High School is one of at least 15 Muslim student groups at Northern Virginia high schools, most of which have sprung up in the past 10 years. Group activities typically include school wide events, community service and recreational events for members. At Chantilly High, students founded the Muslim Students Association in 2005 so that they would have a place together for Friday prayers.

At South County Secondary School, the Muslim Students Association formed in November 2009 to “help improve people’s view of Islam and educate our Muslim and non-Muslim youth,” said Anam Mian, president and founder of the South County group.

Similarly, at Lake Braddock Secondary School, a group of students founded the Muslim Students Association around the time of the Sept. 11 attacks to increase awareness about Islam and Muslims, said Haider Dost, co-president of the Lake Braddock MSA.

But after almost a decade of raising awareness, groups are starting to focus more on their members and developing a sense of community among Muslim youth.

According to Dost, a senior who splits his time between Lake Braddock and Northern Virginia Community College: “The MSA is meant to foster unity for the Muslim students, make Muslims comfortable at school, and give them a place to hang out.” Through weekly meetings, Dost said students build unity and strength through their shared experiences as Muslims growing up in America.

The MSA’s role as a support group has been particularly important for female students who wear the hijab, or head scarf.

More recently however, Muslim students have

reported only positive experiences within the school community, which Dost attributes to the work of the Muslim Student Association in dispelling myths about Islam. Youth groups often also provide teenagers with a space to discuss sensitive topics they would feel uncomfortable discussing with their parents who often grew up outside the U.S., said Dost.

The Youth Group of the Mustafa Center, an Islamic center and mosque in Annandale, is planning a debate over whether certain types of music are permissible in Islam, a controversial topic within the Islamic community of particular interest to teenagers.

Dost and other young Muslim leaders in Virginia founded the Virginia High School MSA Council in October 2009.

In addition, there are Muslim student groups at West Springfield, Thomas Jefferson, T.C. Williams, McLean and Madison high schools.

Muslim youth groups are also aware of the important function they play in today’s religious climate. Though the five young men from Alexandria arrested in Pakistan last month have not been formally charged with terrorism, the case highlights the importance of moderate Muslim outlets for Muslim youth. The Mustafa Center Youth Group seeks to meet just this need. One of the men arrested in Pakistan had been active in the Mustafa Center Mosque.

In response to the arrest of the former community member, the Mustafa Center Youth Group, made up of Muslim college students who plan recreational and educational events geared toward high school students, invited a panel of prominent American Muslim scholars and imams to speak at an event called “Calling all heroes: the error in terrorism.” Ali Baluch, vice president of the Mustafa Center Youth Group and a resident of Fairfax who studies sociology at Northern Virginia Community College, said the title called on moderate Muslim youth to educate themselves about Islam and raise their voices against extremism, “because that’s what we need right now, not more suicide bombers.”

More than 100 students, parents, and community members attended the event, held Jan. 9, at the Mustafa Center. Panelists spoke about the reasons why some Muslim youth may be tempted by extremist voices on the Internet, citing difficulties in reconciling Muslim and American identity, frustration caused by American foreign policy, and low self-esteem, can make some young people more vulnerable to extremist recruiters, similar to gangs. The event focused on positive solutions to these problems.

“We tried to show how you can still be patriotic and still be a Muslim,” said Baluch.



Photo by Sofia Saiyed/The Connection
One of the Muslim students at Chantilly High School says the call to prayer.



Ready, Set, Go

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very low,” he said. His daughter, Kaylee went on to take photography classes at the Bullis school (even though she attends another school), and will be taking photography classes next year, in high school.

“Parents treat camp like an investment in a multi-layered experience that will pay-off later on,” said Cronin.

“Camp opens their eyes to different possibilities, opportunities that they wouldn’t have otherwise,” said Elperin.

Both parents and camp directors want children to develop long-lasting interests and have a sense of accomplishment while at camp. Rosenbaum said one camper, when asked by a friend why she goes back to TIC every summer, told her friend: “Because we make great things.”

“Camp boosts their self esteem: my daughter made a tie-dye t-shirt last year that she still wears. It gives her a sense of pride,” said Clement.

Brendan, age 11, likes TIC primarily for the sports, and not the computer component. Many

parents want their children to stay outside during the summer.

“I didn’t want them to stay in the house, get too involved with electronics,” said Clement.

A single father signed up his son for the entire eight weeks of the TIC camp, a rare case which surprised Rosenbaum. At the end of the summer the father came back and said, “I didn’t know I sent my kid to fat camp.” The chubby boy lost 11 pounds, thanks to the sports he participated in while at TIC camp.

Choosing camp is usually the parents’ decision. However, children are getting more involved in the process.

“They locate different camps on the internet to show their parents,” said Linda Pulliam of the Virginia division of the American Camp Association.

Cronin estimates that about 60 percent of the decisions are made solely by parents. Camp directors agree that parents should take their children’s preferences into consideration. “Let the kid choose, it will more likely be committed,” said Rosenbaum.