

The Coolest Summer Camps

*Interesting & Engaging Alternatives
to Traditional Summer Camps*

BY COURTNEY LINDWALL

Most everyone remembers summer camp as a kid — weeks of swimming lessons, day hikes and bonfires with your bunkmates. But there are additional options.

Around Gainesville, unique summer camps have popped up to offer specialized activities and, hopefully, more rewarding experiences during the time away from school.

Marine Biology

Spend summer like a true Floridian — in the water.

Summer can be more than camp counselors sitting around watching the kids play, said Maggie Martin, who helps run the summer

programs at Oak Hall School. Beginning June 17, the school will be hosting Marine Biology Summer Exploration Camp for children entering fifth grade and up.

They take all-day field trips every day of the week, Martin said.

Because of the small enrollment (only 24 students last summer), campers are often able to get back-scene tours and talk to professionals. The focus is on having fun — but children are always learning.

The program is separated into two weeklong sessions, which feature different trips.

The camp begins in Gainesville with a trip to the University of Florida fisheries. Students will learn about marine life from the experts.

Next, the group will head to

the Santa Fe River for a canoe trip. The Santa Fe River runs through Alachua County to the Suwannee River. The slow-flowing river even runs for a few miles underground, re-appearing in High Springs.

The third day will be out on the water for boating and fishing at Cedar Key, a cluster of small islands off Florida's west coast. Heading south, campers will explore saltwater estuaries and kayak at Fort Desoto State Park outside of St. Petersburg. The park is famous for its beauty and history, dating back to the Native American Indians. Next, there will be an overnight stay at the landmark Florida Aquarium in Tampa. The aquarium has around 20,000 marine plants and animals, from sharks to otters.





The fifth and last day of the camp before heading back to Gainesville will be spent in Clearwater Marine Aquarium to visit the marine animal hospital and see Winter, the dolphin from the movie "Dolphin Tale." Winter was rescued off the coast of Florida in 2005 after being found stuck in a crab trap. To save her life, her tail had to be amputated. Winter became famous

after being fitted with a prosthetic tail that allowed her to swim again and return to normal life.

The marine biology camps' second session will include similar trips to places such as the Devil's Den spring for snorkeling or the Withlacoochee River for an airboat tour. The second session's big trip will be to Seaworld. Both trips will be supervised by lifeguards.

Theater Camp

Each week at theater camp is a chance to be a star.

Alongside the Gainesville Association for the Creative Arts, Oak Hall School is offering a drama and musical theater day camp where students will learn technique and have the chance to put on new performance at the end of each week.

The students write the scripts themselves, Martin said. Each week's production is their original creation.

Different workshops will be hosted throughout the summer on topics such as acting theory, vocal performance and audition techniques. There are junior and senior divisions with only 14 campers allowed in each group, giving each camper time on stage.

"They come up with different scenes, skits and lines," Martin said.

The program is taught by Oak Hall School's performing arts



director, Dr. William Eyerly, who also plans to bring in other guests. The performances are open to the public and take place in Oak Hall School's theater. The first session begins on June 10, and the last session ends on August 5.

The "Young Actor's Portfolio Workshop" takes place July 22 to 26 and offers a chance for real drama enthusiasts to build resumes and audition reels.

Camp Invention

For Gainesville's young tinkerers and gadgeteers, Camp Invention embraces children's inner innovators. Camp Invention, a national program, gives students a chance to learn 21st-century skills through different science-, engineering-, and business-related activities. Children rotate through different modules during the day, solving problems

and conducting experiments.

For example, students may rebuild their rocket ships while stuck on a strange planet, decide how to cross a river of lava while on a faraway island or figure out how to gather sea creatures without harming them while under the ocean. Invention Camp builds imagination and life-skills.

The camp is for children entering first through sixth grade. In Gainesville, there are two locations: Hidden Oaks Elementary School and Lawton Chiles Elementary School. Camp locations will rotate through Camp Invention's four different programs throughout the summer: Create, Innovate, Geo-Quest, Spark and Explore, which all have different themes.

In the Create Program, one module called "Saving Sludge City" teaches campers about environmental science and conservation.



Children recreate the pollution in Sludge City and then brainstorm ways to clean it up.

"Participants explore green city design, water filtration systems, safe water disposal, conservation techniques, and renewable energy as they completely reconstruct the town," the website states.

For those more inclined to chemistry experiments than canoe lessons, Camp Invention may be a perfect summer fit.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF
OAK HALL SCHOOL

Campers at Eastside High School's Institute of Culinary Arts test out their new culinary expertise, dressed in full chef attire. Taste of Summer: Cooking 101 has small groups like these to allow hands-on experience in the kitchen. The camp is open to children ages 10 and up.



Culinary Camp

For an aspiring Julia Child or Gordon Ramsay, Cooking 101: Taste of Summer day camp teaches the kitchen basics. Run jointly by Oak Hall School and Eastside High School's Institute of Culinary Arts, this program will teach campers culinary technique in a hands-on, interactive environment.

They will prepare main dishes, sides and desserts, all while working with Chef Billie DeNunzio of Eastside High School's Institute of Culinary Arts. Small groups of around 10 allow each camper to get personal attention.

Oak Hall School states that the camp is meant for students to enjoy themselves while learning about

good food — from garden to plate. At the end of the day, campers are also able to sit down with peers and enjoy what they have created.

"Each day, they'll do something different," Martin said. "One day they'll do sushi. One day they'll do Italian."

When the day is done, kids leave home with their leftover food boxed up.

The camp will run from June 10 to 14 at Eastside High School. For students who may already have culinary experience, there is also a more advanced session that runs the same dates.

"It's pretty awesome to see what they've created," Martin said. ■