

Computer science teacher Tammy Neuhaus makes weekly summer tech camp a 'Wonderland' at Wintriss Technical School with innovative Alice program

By Lee Schoenbart

Imagine that, sending your kids to camp to play video games without them knowing they're learning about computer science and technology.

It's not sneaky; it's smart. And smart is what it's all about in order for the next generation of students to be able to compete and thrive in school and eventually in the real world as young adults.

Tammy Neuhaus, the Westview High School computer science teacher, has joined educational forces with Vic Wintriss' Wintriss Technical School for its first-ever summer tech camp for boys and girls in sixth through 12th grade.

"I first got involved with Vic when he was interested in setting up a robotics competition," recalled Neuhaus, a computer science and physics teacher since 1999. "His school is sponsoring a robotics competition at the San Diego County Fair this summer.

"At Westview, I'm an advisor to the robotics club, so my club was very interested in participating in the competition. That's how I connected with Vic and then I told him I'd be interested," she said.

Neuhaus and Wintriss have similar goals with regard to educating children – encouraging more students to get excited about computer science and technology in ways that are enjoyable.

"The tech camp was my idea," said Neuhaus, who earned a bachelor's degree in electrical engineering from Brown University. "I suggested to him that it would be fun for kids to do a summer technology camp that I wanted to offer through his school. He offers afterschool activities for grade-level students, but this is the first time that we're offering week-long summer camp."

She said the most attractive thing about the summer program that will draw kids in is "the way that I'm approaching the camp is it's teaching about computer science through a very innovative program called Alice, like Alice in Wonderland. As a matter of fact, their logo is an image of the Alice in Wonderland character."

The Alice program is a teaching tool developed originally by Carnegie Mellon University, which has one of the nation's premier computer science schools.

"It's a way of learning programming by creating little animated stories," said Neuhaus who worked as an electrical engineer for 12 years developing computer hardware and software. "It gets kids, even down to the middle-school level, really excited because they can make these stories and, instead of sitting there and typing in things that don't necessarily have meaning to them, they end up producing these little videos.

"You can teach the kids the concept and let them go," she said, "and they come up with their own stories and, yet, they're all learning computer science and having a lot of fun with it."

Neuhaus' advice to parents who want to expose their kids to more tech education, but that the out-of-schoolers might see as more science and math during the summer and won't want to participate is to make it fun.

"I think a lot of kids who are given the opportunity, like to sit in front of computers and do things that they think are fun. And they view that not as a hardcore math or science activity, but fun things to do with computers."

Tech Camp is from 9 a.m. to noon Monday through Friday the weeks of July 7, July 14 and Aug. 4, and from 9 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. the week of June 30 for \$300 per session at Wintriss Technical Schools, 12707 High Bluff Drive, Suite 200.

For information and registration, call (858) 481-2100 or e-mail admin@wintrisstech.org.

To learn more about Wintriss and Alice, visit www.wintrisstech.org and www.alice.org.

