



Entertainment

Summer Camp a success in spite of COVID-19

By **Aida Mallard**

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In spite of the novel coronavirus, 25 campers ages 6-17 at the Super Smart Summer Camp appeared thrilled Friday to be around their peers albeit social distancing and wearing face masks.

Hosted by the Star Center Theatre, the award-winning camp featured academics and arts curriculum, a robust safety protocol and lots of fun in the mix.

Angela Terrell, public relations officer at the Star Center, said the camp is following strict COVID -19 guidelines to ensure safety and includes social distancing, a lower than normal student/teacher ratio and teacher assistants who are responsible for disinfecting and cleaning learning spaces and the eating area.

One week into the camp, campers on Friday engaged in age appropriate classes and activities.

The campers are taught by licensed, certified teachers in a curriculum that includes computer learning, science, social studies, reading, piano classes, violin classes, dance classes, voice classes, and drama and theatre classes and more. There are camp counselors to help and guide campers.

Terrell said "In spite of the challenges we face due to the COVID-19 pandemic, our campers are experiencing great success."

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"The arts are created for personal interaction and our staff has found ways to implement creative interactive learning without compromising the health and safety of our campers," Terrell said. "We can hardly wait for our campers to shine as they share with their families during our end of camp activities."

Campers have been rehearsing and preparing for two culminating activities — The Music Rehearsal where they show off what they've learned at camp and the Broadway style theatre production of "Peter Pan," which are set for June 18 and 19 and open to the public. The productions will be presented on an outdoor stage with opportunities for parents to watch the show while social distancing.

For approximately 20 years, the Star Center Theatre has provided affordable arts education and performance opportunities to countless area youths and their families. The camp, which has been a summer favorite since its inception in 2004, is held for three weeks during June.

As the coronavirus continues to ravage the U.S and the rest of the world, Terrell said the Star Center closed in early March, and after much consideration and the implementation of robust safety protocols the camp opened on schedule June 1.

Terrell said the computer lab benefited from two computers provided by the Cultural Art Coalition and its executive director Nkwanda Jah.

Tradina Thomas, who is teaching computer classes, said the campers are learning art and music terms, rhythms and composition in an age-appropriate model.

"The kids are getting the routine and it's been working well," Thomas said. "They are participating, learning, and having fun."

Six-year-old Leeantwan said he is looking forward to science class and making slime. As far as wearing a mask, he said he doesn't mind it except when his glasses get foggy.

Carrington, a rising sixth-grader visiting from Atlanta and the granddaughter of Terrell, said this is her third year at camp and acting is her favorite class. She plans to become a TV actress.

"It (camp) takes some adjusting — being six feet apart and wearing masks except when we're eating," said Carrington. "Otherwise camp is as normal as ever."

Peyton said this is his first time at camp, but he will be back next year.

"It's fun and I like dancing and playing Limbo," he said.

Alanis, a rising 8th-grader, said she is trying to adjust. "The upside is camp is very fun and you get to see people, interact and connect with friends," said Alanis.

Amarria, who is a lead counselor at the camp, said her job is to encourage and guide campers. She has implemented a reward system where campers and other counselors receive rewards for effort and good behavior.

Dr. Sulmarie Duncan, who for three years now has been in charge of camp operations, said the challenge is keeping kids moving and on task, and teaching them about social distancing and why they must wear face masks.

The takeaway said Duncan is "We're all in this together. We're responsible for each other. We are – indeed – our brother's keeper."

Rhonda Wilson, founder of the Star Center and the Super Smart Summer Camp, said the camp participants are mostly regulars and a few new kids.

"It's been a success," said Wilson. "Really good."