

NEWS

Happy campers: 'There's nothing like some outdoor, fresh air, summertime fun for kids'

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If parents are wondering whether it'll be another silent summer spent indoors with their kids, well, things are going to be different this year.

After a year of COVID-19 restrictions for social gatherings, and based on the fact that coronavirus cases across the state and nation are drastically decreasing due to vaccinations, summer camps for kids are back this summer.

Summer camps, of course, include everything from regular outdoor day and overnight camps, sports camps and scouting programs — fortunately, all are available for kids and their parents to choose from.

For the Worcester Bravehearts, which conduct a popular weeklong baseball camp for kids, this summer is going to be more important than ever.

“Throughout their school year, whether it was in-person or hybrid or remote learning, there's nothing like some outdoor, fresh air, summertime fun for kids to get together in a safe and responsible way and play with their friends,” said John Creedon, president of the Worcester Bravehearts.

This year, more than ever, Girls Inc. CEO Victoria Waterman said children need access to healthy outdoor activities and social-emotional support from program staff to mitigate the negative effects of the prolonged social isolation.

While having fun during the camp experiences, each camp organization adheres strictly to the COVID-19 guideline. Any rules regarding COVID-19 will be based on state and local health department guidelines and CDC recommendations.

So, what will each camp organization provide for children and young adults this summer?

Girls Inc. of Worcester

At Girls Inc. of Worcester, the summer camp at Camp Kinneywood offers under-resourced girls from the Worcester community access to recreational and educational activities.

The summer camp will last from June 28 to Aug. 20, with different topics and activities each week.

“Our programs provide critical skills, knowledge and life-changing experiences in the areas of health/wellness, academic enrichment and life skills development,” Waterman said.

According to Waterman, 61% of girls going to Girls Inc. camps come from low-income households, who make less than \$60,000 a year, and 74% are girls of color.

“More than any other group, these two groups have been negatively impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic,” she said.

Throughout the summer camp each week, girls will participate in themed weeklong projects where they will work together with their peers on learning about the weekly theme and participating in fun crafts or creative activities.

On a typical day, girls will have the choice between a variety of activities such as swimming, kayaking, ballgames and educational activities.

Waterman said educational activities typically include STEM-related activities, which they will be working with volunteers from the National Association of Technology, and a summer “reading program.”

“This year, our reading program focuses on helping girls make up for some of the learning loss they have experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic,” Waterman said.

The reading program includes available books from the Worcester School District’s summer reading list and dogs and volunteers from National Education for Assistance Dog Services.

How the program works is that the girls will be able to read to furry friends, and Waterman said research shows that the strategy is effective in improving reading skills and increasing reading time.

“We are very excited about this amazing opportunity for our girls,” Waterman said.

For more information on the Girls Inc. camp, go to girlsincworchester.org/camp

Worcester Bravehearts

The Bravehearts will hold two weeklong day sessions filled with instruction and fun, July 19-23 and July 26-30, at Hanover Insurance Park at Fitton Field on the Holy Cross college campus.

Bravehearts general manager Dave Peterson said the goal is to have each camper leave with a smile on their face.

The baseball camp has been running for eight years, and is open to all boys and girls ages 6-12.

Creedon said it's important for kids to be around with each other to be able to socialize after a year of isolation, even though kids will have a variety of situations, whether being comfortable with a group setting, or being a little more bashful.

"Think back to when we ourselves were kids, what our summers look like and what we're doing, it was an innocent time, and these poor kids have had quite a curveball thrown at them with this pandemic," Creedon said. "But we're super excited to get the kids back on the baseball field and having fun with each other."

Peterson said they also have coaches and players run drills that focus on improving each camper's fundamental baseball skills, as well as communication skills.

"Most importantly, campers learn how to be a good teammate. It all culminates with a game at the end of the week, where the campers get to have their names announced over the PA system, just like at a real game," he said.

Register at worcesterbravehearts.com/kids/summer-camps/

Boy Scouts of America, Heart of New England Council

Treasure Valley Scout Reservation of the Heart of New England Council Boy Scouts of America will be holding summer programs for both children (Cub Scouts and Webelos) and young adults (Scouts and Venturers).

The camps for Scouts will run from June 27 to Aug. 14 at both Camp Wanocksett and Treasure Valley, and the camps for Cub Scouts will run from July 12 to July 23 at Treasure Valley.

Despite the pandemic, BSA Scout Executive Mark Barbernitz said the Scout members have put their best foot forward trying to manage all the changes the pandemic has created.

Many of their Scout units found creative ways to be able to meet with Zoom meetings, or outdoor practices following all the mandated safety requirements, when possible, to keep others safe.

“Summer camp is the pinnacle of the Scouting experience. A summer resident camp experience allows Scouts BSA members to put into practice all the skills they have learned in Scouting,” Barbernitz said.

In the Scout camps, most activities are done in group settings, Barbernitz said, such as lifesaving, first aid, nature, archery, rifle shooting, cooking and general Scout skills.

More camp information, go to hnebsa.org/camping/tvsr/

Girl Scouts of Central & Western Massachusetts

Throughout July and August, Girl Scouts of Central & Western Massachusetts will be having day camp and resident camp for girls who have finished kindergarten and first grade, respectively.

Girl Scout camp is open to all girls, and no prior scouting experience is needed to attend.

Day camp will be held at Camp Bonnie Brae in East Otis; Camp Green Eyrie in Harvard; Camp Laurel Wood in Spencer; and Camp Lewis Perkins in South Hadley.

Overnight resident camp will be at Camp Bonnie Brae and Camp Green Eyrie.

“We train our counselors to foster community in their small groups, build trust among campers and to help each participant feel comfortable in unfamiliar surroundings,” said Dana Carnegie, communications manager of Girl Scouts of Central & Western Massachusetts.

According to research from the American Camping Association and Girl Scout Research Institute, the evidence shows that Girl Scout camp sets girls up for a lifetime of success.

Spending time in nature improves concentration and creative reasoning, and outdoor experiences also help promote healthy social development and increase a girl’s self-esteem, Carnegie said.

Their Girl Scout summer camps allow girls to explore themed weeks and experience Girl Scouts traditional activities such as canoeing, kayaking, archery, fire building, outdoor fire-cooking, crafting and more.

Something new this year, they will offer hatchet throwing for girls in sixth through 12th grade.

More camp information can be viewed at gscwm.org/en/camp/Camp--Outdoors/summer-camp.html

Discovery Adventures of Old Sturbridge Village

How about being immersed in the 1830s? Well, that's the goal of Discovery Adventures of Old Sturbridge Village, which is able to offer kids experience of traveling back into the era of the Village community.

The kids get to wear historic dresses, interact with staff and the public and do many hands-on creative projects.

“Learning is an inherently social activity, and social engagement online is not the same,” said Daniel Friel, OSV director of public and government relations. “Having the opportunity for in-person activities that programs like Discovery Adventures provide is so essential for kids, especially the case this year.”

Discovery Adventures also promotes social skills.

The groups are usually 10 to 12 kids of the same age, and at the end of the camp, they become close friends who return to the village each year to do the program again together.

Activities within the program include farm chores, garden chores, sewing, woodworking, nature walks, painting crafts, pottery, printing, scavenger hunts, historic games, sketching in the museum and working with the museum's collections.

“Working together on such engaging and unique tasks creates strong bonds,” Friel said.

For more camp information go to osv.org/education/discovery-adventures/

American Camp Association, New England

The American Camp Association accredits nearly 400 camps throughout New England.

Camps offer traditional activities such as field sports, boating, arts and crafts, and nature programs.

Over the years, camps have also expanded to include things like extreme sports, culinary classes, music studios and STEM education.

Thanks to a large number of camps that could not operate last summer due to the pandemic, there were a lot of disappointed children and young adults, said Michele Rowcliffe, executive director of New England American Camp Association.

“We know that whatever impact the pandemic had, camps are naturally primed to be a safe environment to ease back into the next iteration of normal,” Rowcliffe said. “For many young people, camp will be their first opportunity to get social again and interact with their peers.”

Through the camp activities, she said, campers and staff both are able to develop their socialization skills, such as cooperation, leadership, resilience, problem solving, creative thinking and risk taking.

For more info, go to acanewengland.org/