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## Lamorinda Schools

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### Bodhi Seed Camp, Awakening Young Minds

By Sophie Braccini



Children sitting in the Monastery during story telling

Photo Sophie Braccini

For the first time, the Buddha Gate Monastery of Lafayette proposed a camp for children ages 5 to 15 where they learned about Buddhist values and Chinese culture, how to meditate, and mingled with more traditional fun activities. Quite an unusual experience in Lamorinda!

The Buddhist Monastery is nestled on a peaceful property at the northern border of Lafayette. The week-long camp was full, with 80 kids attending, and began on August 2.

Classes were taught by the Abbess, Master Jian Sheng, herself and many other volunteers. Evan Cushing, a Lafayette native and college student majoring in philosophy and religion, was the head of the T.A.s. "The children were amazing," he said. "Most of them had had no previous experience of meditation and/or Buddhism. Some hated it at first, but they got taken by the Abbess story-telling abilities and through her guidance learned to quiet their bodies and mind. After two or three days they got the knack of it and loved it."

The children confirmed. "It is hard to concentrate on nothing," said Uma who will be attending sixth grade at Stanley Middle School this year. "You make sure your body is completely still and after I really enjoy the calm." She plans to continue the practice, especially

before tests.

"I like to sit still," said 10-year-old Irene.

The young T.A.s enjoyed the camp as well. Fifteen-year-old Alan Deaton (who will be a junior at Miramonte this fall) had never had any exposure to that culture and its practices. "Once I was able to do it, it was cool, it felt really relaxing and I was truly focused afterward." Deaton was interested by the whole camp, and, even though he does not think he would become a vegetarian, enjoyed the values that were taught.

Meditation is a technique that is central to the Buddhist teaching. "Meditation is a way to raise awareness and reveal one's true nature," said the Abbess. "In our busy lives our minds get scattered. Meditation helps to re-center inward." She was very impressed by the children who came to the camp. "They were very active and present," she said. "They followed guidance and participated eagerly."

Meditation was just a part of the daily activities of the children. They experienced Tai Chi, Dharma instruments, candle making, mosaic, and gymnastics, among other activities. The Monastery did not require any payment for the camp. "This is Dana giving," explains Margaret Goglia, a Moraga resident who has been involved with Buddha Gate for two years. "One gives

without expecting anything in return."

Parents can make donations, according to what feels right to them or they can help with the camp. Uma's mother, Lafayette resident Shalini Agrawal expressed her gratitude for the experience. "There is nothing quite comparable in the area," she said. "The Buddhist teachings are not exactly our culture (her family is Hindu), but the values are universal and very centering." She appreciated the opening to a different culture that the camp offered her daughters.

For the Abbess, the purpose of the camp was to plant a seed. "In Taiwan, our Venerable Master Wei Chueh created a children camp many years ago." She remembers the story of a student who had been to the camp as a kid, and who, as a young adult met with challenges that drove him close to deep depression. "He was able to draw from the happy memories he had kept from his youth camp to re-center his life and he wrote a beautiful thank you letter to the Monastery," she remembers, adding, "When a seed is planted you never know when it will mature and flourish."

During the year, the Monastery offers on-going classes for children and adults. For more information, go to [www.buddhagate.org](http://www.buddhagate.org).

### 4-H California Youth Fair, Something for Everyone

Submitted by Jennifer Chan



Advanced poultry showmanship participants at the CA Youth Fair. Left to right - Carolyn Campbell, Alison Jefferson, Allison Kostecki, Madison Gibson and Jennifer Chan

This year's winner for small master showmanship (one of the highest 4-H honors at the California Youth Fair held July 13 to 18 at the Antioch fair grounds) was Allison Kostecki from Lamorinda.

Throughout the week participants practiced and trained their animals so that they were ready later in the week for showmanship - a basic competition where participants work animals to the best of their ability. An overall winner is chosen who had the best showing of all of the different species.

Animal competitions weren't the only thing at the fair. The Stills building featured still objects created by 4-H'ers. There was sewing, woodworking, cooking, photography, poetry, decorating, educational panels, and so much more. These items, too, got placed. Anyone under nine years old

was not judged but received a participation ribbon.

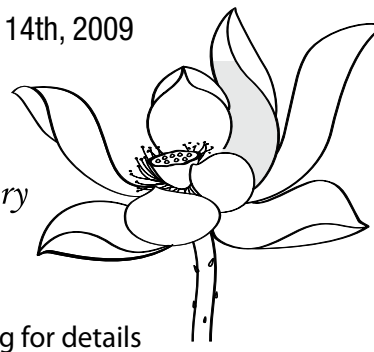
For more information about the Contra Costa County 4-H youth program, visit <http://groups.ucanr.org/cc4h/>. Twelve-year-old Jennifer Chan attended the California Youth Fair with her 4-H Club in July.

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## How Six Figure Income Families Get Thousands of Dollars in Free Money For College

Local man teaches free workshops to help parents save thousands in process

**Moraga**---East Bay parents that are planning on sending a child to college in the next few years, but aren't quite sure how to pay for it can now rest a little easier. Gerna Benz of Bay Area College Planners has been educating families in the community for over 15 years.

"It's really sad, but most parents that we talk to have done real well financially, but never found the time to save for college, and now they're facing a bill of \$18,000-\$45,000 a year, and they don't know who to turn to," he says. "Further, most of the time, all they hear is to not even bother applying for any aid because they make too much money. However, most of the time, that is simply not true even if they make a six-figure income."

Gerna would know, because his group has worked with over 1400 families in the last 10 years ranging from single moms to corporate CEO's, and they say they can help anyone get through the process and save a bundle.... no matter how good of a student they have or how much money they make.

"I got started in this because I was a very good student, but no one told us anything about how to access money for college, or even how to pick a career...so I didn't go right away. But, I vowed that I would learn the process and devote my time to helping families not fall into the same trap that we did. 'Simply put, we show parents the truth that they aren't hearing anywhere else about how the college process really works and save thousands of dollars in the process.'" Lamorinda parents will have an opportunity

to hear Gerna speak. He is teaching his class 'How to Give Your Kid a 4-Year College Education Without Going Broke!' on Saturday August 22nd at the Moraga Library located at 1500 St. Mary's Road, Moraga, CA 94556 from 11:00pm-12:15pm PM.

"We'll discuss everything from the greatest myths about the college process, to how to send your student to a fancy private school for less than the cost of a junior college...it'll be like learning how to get a brand new Lexus for the price of a used pick up truck," he grins.

Topics will also include why private scholarships and 529 plans are a waste of time, how to double or even triple the amount of free money you receive from each school, and how to avoid the one mistake that will kill your chances of getting any money at all that almost every other parent will make this coming January, and much, much more.

"They will learn a ton, and I do my best to make the class fun," he says. "It's like I'm giving them a super bright flash light to navigate a pitch black cave, while all the other parents continue to stumble around blindly! 'Don't forget: the class is totally free, but seats are limited. Also, we are not sure when we will be teaching these classes in the East Bay again since my August and September calendar is already filling up, so come on out and see me.' You can reserve a seat online at [www.baycollegeplanners.com](http://www.baycollegeplanners.com) or by calling our 24 hour reservation line at (877) 924-3726.

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