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Lafayette puts 'awesome' into after-school care

By Pippa Fisher



Awesome camper Camilla Steffen has fun in the playground with Counselor Popcorn. Photo Ying Stroebe

In an attempt to address the dire need across the community for after school care providers, Lafayette's Parks, Trails and Recreation Department will be taking their "awesome" brand of child care and offering five-day a week supervision and activities after school in the community center.

PTR Director Jonathan Katayanagi explained that over the past three years the demand has skyrocketed. "The numbers of working parents have risen steeply. We were getting letters and emails demanding an after-school program," he said. "We were approached by a lot of parents. There is a real shortage of care. We hope that we can help fill this community need."

The schools, as well as Lafayette Elementary School District Superintendent of Schools Rachel Zinn, were getting similar requests. Although the elementary schools offer their own after-school programs, there is not enough space in them to meet demand.

Recreation Coordinator Steven Heinsma, who is in charge of the new program, says that the demand is mostly coming from parents of kindergarten children, as young families move into the area.

Heinsma says that the department looked at its resources and sent out a survey in the spring, which produced over 200 responses showing the great need.

Heinsma is working closely with fellow Recreation Coordinator Tricia Young, who is in charge of the tiny tots preschool and kinder gym program, and is providing support and guidance to ensure they develop programs to allow kids to grow and learn.

As summer rolls along the program is filling fast. Currently the program is offering a maximum of 30 spots for kindergarten through fifth grade, although the program can take some late-shift Transitional Kindergarten students.

Children will be transported from their schools to the community center. Staff will ride the buses with the children for the first week, but every day children will be walked onto the bus by teachers at the schools and be received straight off the bus at the community center by staff. And with a staff ratio of 1-10 students, there will be plenty of supervision to keep children safe.

The program will offer free play, sports, hikes, arts and crafts, science, homework help as well as other enrichment programs. The cost, says Heinsma, will work out to an average of about \$9 an hour and, although priority is given to those seeking five-day care, families may also sign up for partial-week use.

The recreation department staff know what they are doing in this field. With many years of the ever-popular Camp Awesome providing summertime fun and activities, parents have confidence in the program, as the survey proved.

Details on how to apply can be found on the PTR page of the city website <http://www.lovelafayette.org/city-hall/city-departments/parks-trails-recreation/recreation-programs/after-school-awesome>.

Heinsma says the goal is to expand the program in the future. "I am excited to have all the kids here, to help them build a love for the community center and to have fun," he says.

How awesome is that?

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