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Going stampin'

Stamp camp for kids makes first visit to Altoona

August 14, 2008

Jimmy Mincin, jmincin@altoonamirror.com

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If your child is looking to do something a little different this summer, you might consider introducing them to the world of stamps.

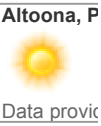
Stamp Camp USA, a collaborative educational program that boosts children's skills and knowledge through the use of worldwide stamps, is coming to Subway Stamp Shop Inc. in Altoona from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Aug. 21.

"We start with the basics of stamp collecting, introducing them to the proper terminology, how to work with hinging and stamp mounts and various storage methods," said Cheryl Edg-comb, the camp's chief executive officer and founder. "We also go into a program that explains the types of stamps they can collect and the variety of ways people do collect. Once we get through the basics, everything becomes hands-on, and that's when we get real creative - like creating three-dimensional stamp projects."

Geared to children ages 8 through 14, the camp not only instructs campers how to begin a stamp collection, it also teaches them how to begin the competitive stamp exhibit process. Focusing on three-dimensional stamp exhibits, as well as more researched-based traditional modes, campers will complete both forms of exhibits at the camp, while earning stamp camp cash incentives to spend at the end-of-camp auction.

The hands-on learning style has been a hit among campers, Edgcomb of Knox-ville, Pa., said. She recalled several projects she's encountered at past camps: a stamp-mounted train constructed from aluminum cans, an airplane built out of a paper towel roll mounted with various airmail stamps; and a flower garden made from a shadow box, popsicle sticks and flower stamps.

"It's a very creative process," she said. "No two (projects) are ever alike."



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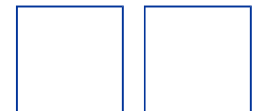
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Then there's the aforementioned traditional mode, which involves cultivating reading and writing skills.

"Good researching skills definitely come into play," she said. "They can also develop good math skills - life skills."

Stamp Camp USA began in 1995 in Tioga County, according to the camp's Web Site, www.stampcampusa.org. Edgcomb taught the fundamentals of philately (the collection and study of postage stamps) with the help of two elementary school teachers, Suzzane Harer and Sylvia Wood, both of the Northern Tioga School District.

As interest in the program grew during the next four years, Edgcomb was promoted from her Knoxville postmaster position with the United States Postal Service to pilot Stamp Camp USA on a national level at Postal Headquarters in Washington, D.C.

In 2003, it became incorporated in Pennsylvania.

Two years later, it achieved IRS designation as a nonprofit 501c3 educational organization.

In 2006, the camp became part of the Washington 2006 International Stamp Show Committee, and this opened the door to its international expansion. So far, it has been to Texas, Oregon, Florida, Georgia, Virginia, District of Columbia, New York, Connecticut and Cayman Islands.

"It's something we encourage kids to get involved in, and it's definitely something that kids can keep with them all their lives," Subway owner Virginia Goldberg said of the camp. "The more kids we have doing positive things, the less likely they'll be out getting in trouble. Plus, it's not just educational - it's fun."

Goldberg, 71, of Altoona said beyond the learning experience, the camp also offers familial benefits.

"Initially, it could just be the interaction with parents or grandparents that kids enjoy. It's good family time," she said. "After that, it's curiosity about the world and its geography that keeps them interested."

One of those "interested" kids is Goldberg's 12-year-old granddaughter, Heather Lastra, also of Altoona. She's attended the camp three times before - in Chicago; Portland, Ore.; and Wellsboro. She's been fascinated with stamps since she first discovered her grandmother's shop at age 7.

"I love all the different things you can do with stamps," she said. "There are so many different ways to collect them and take care of them. I like to learn about all the different places and things (depicted) on the stamps."

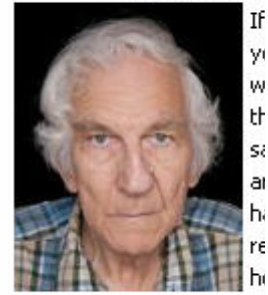
As a collector of what she called "worldwide stamps," Heather especially enjoys amassing stamps from England.

"It's just because I love England," she said. "It's so beautiful there."

Is she excited about attending her fourth Stamp Camp USA?

"Oh yeah," she said. "I get to learn new things and hopefully meet up with people I've met through other Stamp Camps. And I get to

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Mirror Staff Writer Jimmy Mincin is at 946-7460.

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