

SUMMER CAMP MERGES ART & SCIENCE

by Leigh Ray

What will the campers from the Boys & Girls Club of Seward do the rest of the summer after spending June creating art projects matched up to themes from nature, and using new scientific knowledge during expeditions in the forests and along the bay in Seward? Hard to imagine that anything can match the fun learning activities and experiences they had!

Thanks to a grant from the Seward Community Foundation, art teacher Justine Pechuzal and teacher Leigh Ray provided a plethora of creative activities for about 23 students per week during the DaVinci Art and Science Summer Camp, which met weekdays from noon to 5 p.m. The place-based theme for the summer was Awesome Animals, with each week focusing on a different local animal.

During the first week, campers heard stories and native legends about bears, made bear claw cookies, learned how to draw bears, built bear dens in the woods, learned about bear habitat from Ranger Callie at Exit Glacier, created bear tracks, played games, sang songs, and performed a play about bears for parents before the art show. What a busy week!

During the three weeks that followed, similar activities captivated campers as they learned about songbirds, moose, and sea otters. Pechuzal relished the opportunity to teach eager kids some of the nuts and bolts of various art techniques. For example, during songbird week, children learned printmaking. They began with their own sketches of birds, which became stencils that were placed on top of colorful cloth. Finally, they applied a special paint over their stencils, which were then peeled away to reveal beautiful prints. In addition to the prints, a bright construction-paper booklet held flower and bird sketches made by each child.

During moose week, Pechuzal led campers through a very sophisticated art process that produced stunning results. First, children drew a moose on 11 x 17 white paper. Next, Pechuzal taught them about primary and secondary colors in preparation for the final step of the project by having each child paint his own color wheel. In addition, she taught how to lighten or darken a color by mixing it with either white or black. With those understandings in mind, students pulled out the scissors and cut their moose drawings into four pieces. Finally, students tackled the sophisticated part of the project. They had to choose a different primary or secondary color for each of the four squares, then paint the body of the moose in that chosen color. Then they painted the background of each quadrant in light and dark shades of the color used on that part of the moose drawing.

While Pechuzal led campers through art projects, Ray focused on scientific aspects of the critter being focused on each week. After habitats were discussed, they were recreated in fanciful ways – bear dens, bird nests, sea otter dioramas. Learning all about the eating habits of moose, sea otters, and birds resulted in cooking and eating cookies that emulated bark, sea urchins, and seeds. Understanding animal tracks and what can be learned from them led to creating imprints of each animal's paw, hoof, talon, or flipper in plaster of Paris—complete with a hole & ribbon for hanging on bedroom walls!

Drama, song, poetry, legends and stories rounded out Ray's efforts to make science meaningful and fun. During bear week, kids performed a play for parents that illustrated the frolic and perils a young cub might encounter during its first year of life. Similarly, parents were treated to poetry composed and recited by their children during the Friday art show at the end of moose week.

Many others contributed to the success of the camp in a variety of ways. After a complimentary ride to Exit Glacier, courtesy Exit Glacier Guides, campers learned much from Ranger Callie of the National Park Service. She led them in skull and fur discoveries, bear safety skits, and a hike looking for signs of bears. Kids were thrilled to spot bear poop and trees scratched up by bears.

When learning about songbirds, Ranger Luke of the Kenai Fjords National Park led hikes at Two Lakes Trail in Seward to listen for various songbirds, teacher Jenn Haugh provided campers with rock-painting and drawing activities, and volunteer Brian Ray accompanied the hikers during their songbird expedition.

The excursion for moose week involved planting a food that moose like eating—mountain ash trees! Yet these were planted for the enjoyment of residents at Seward Mountain Haven long term care facility, and not really to feed the moose. Campers donned gloves provided by a grant from the Alaska Initiative for Community Engagement (Alaska ICE) and shovels (provided by the U.S. Forest Service), dug more than 40 holes through the rocky ground, and planted the saplings. The saplings are the last of the Centennial mountain ash trees grown from Seward seed and donated by Steve Leier. The original parent tree was grown at the Bank of Seward (now First National Bank at Fourth and Adams). According to Pat Williams, the bank's former cashier, Harry Balderston imported the seedling and planted it at the bank. The bank tree was transplanted in 1992 to Seward City Hall along 5th Avenue.

The late Mrs. Wilma Lind planted a seedling from this original tree and years later passed seedlings to Mr. Aron Wiklund. Those were planted at his home on Second Avenue—just across the street from the AVTEC Administration building. The seedlings that the Da Vinci Campers planted at Seward Mountain Haven are descendants from Aron's tree.

The tree plantings could not have occurred without the support of Lynn Hohl, who coordinated the efforts and helped on tree-planting day too. Further support came from Seward Providence Administrator Chris Bolton and maintenance managers Ben Faust, Richard Smith, and Blake Pullins. Thanks also to the elders of Mountain Haven who graciously allowed campers to visit their home. Finally, with the help of recreation manager Cody Beck and the Shahbaz (nursing assistants/caretakers), everyone enjoyed cookies and punch, which provided campers with a dose of energy to finish the job!

During sea otter week, campers hiked along Resurrection Bay to look for sea otters—and succeeded in spotting them twice—then were treated to a free afternoon at the SeaLife Center. The day ended up at the waterfront playground, where campers received colorful, ready-to-fly kites courtesy of First National Bank Alaska, Seward branch.

Even though camp leaders packed each week full of activities, they made room for a special guest every Tuesday afternoon. Heidi Zemach brought her guitar and songbooks to lead campers in song! After all, what would summer camp be without song?

Please watch the video to see campers in action at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=11jJacDf14o> or <http://youtu.be/11jJacDf14o>



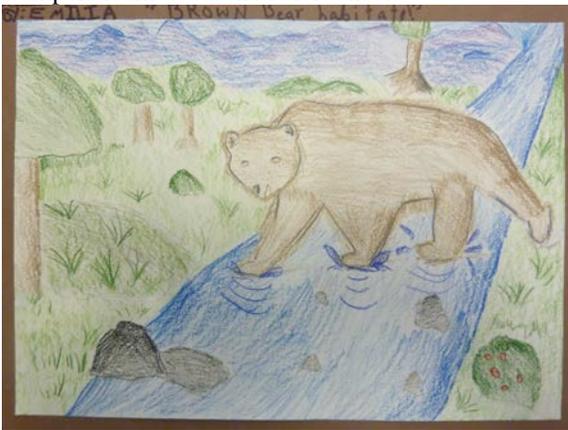
Building bird nests with straw, fur, thread, and flowers!



Planting saplings at Mountain Haven.



Campers learn about the color wheel.



A fabulous bear drawing done by one of the campers.