

Camp Connection

Summer 2015

Running the summer-camp gauntlet

Parents offer suggestions, build technology for camp planning



By SAM SCIOLLA

When sitting down to plan out their children's summers, parents face a number of challenges and questions — both logistical and philosophical in nature.

How will the kids get to and from camp? Do they have a full schedule booked, even in the sparser month of August? How does one know if this or that camp will be the right fit for them? Should the camps they attend be more about learning or fun?

With registration beginning as early as February and continuing through June, the camp-planning journey can be a long and daunting one. However, it's not one that parents have to endure alone, with plenty of other parents available to pool resources and share suggestions.

And, as might be expected in the Bay Area, one parent put her technical expertise to work to simplify this laborious process.

When Peggy Chang moved to Palo Alto with her husband and two kids in 2010 from Belmont, she experienced the challenges of camp planning anew.

Not only did Chang have to learn about the local camp offerings, but she had to fill up her kids' whole summers, as she was working full-time.

Fortunately, not long before, she had embarked on a project with Shilpa Dalmia — a fellow mother and software veteran — to create a Yelp-like online community where parents could search for camps and provide feedback on their kids' experiences. Chang and Dalmia had realized that bringing all this information together, and making it searchable, would be of great value to themselves and other parents.

"This was an under-served area, technology-wise," Chang said.

The result of their efforts was ActivityHero, a website launched in 2012. Today, the website houses more than 4,000 listings for camps and classes throughout the Bay Area, including about a dozen in Pleasanton and dozens more across the Tri-Valley.

In total, the site includes more than 50,000 listings nationwide. With this free service, visitors can browse the

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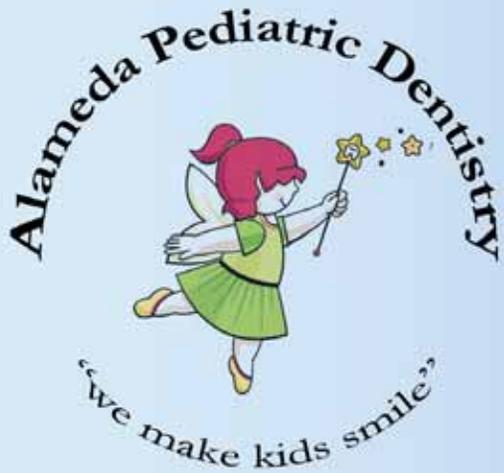
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listings by types of offerings (class, camp, overnight camp, etc.) and categories (academics, art, outdoor, sports, etc.), and then filter results by location, date ranges, age groups and other variables.

In addition to helping parents sift through the abundance of camps out there, ActivityHero also promises to shave time off other aspects of camp planning. Last year, the company added a feature that allows parents to register quickly for camps through its website. Important information is saved from registration to registration, eliminating the need to type or write out the same details over and over.

Chang described it as the "Common App" of camp planning.

ActivityHero also has a planning calendar feature where children's summer schedules can be posted and shared with other parents — so friends can sign up for the same session and guardians can coordinate transportation.

"Parents spend hours in the course of the January through June time frame thinking about these camps," Chang said, "and ActivityHero is just trying to make it easier for every step of the way."

The activity of users on the website provides evidence that many parents are planning summers out in advance. According to Chang, 40% of registrations completed on ActivityHero last year were made three or more months in advance. However, Chang also pointed out that 30% were made

within 30 days of the camp start date.

In keeping with that trend of greater variety, Chang has observed how a new type of specialty or "homegrown" camp has emerged. She described these as often being led by individuals who run a small, less-publicized operation and do it for the love of a particular activity or subject. She has seen more of these businesses crop up on ActivityHero, where camps can be posted for free.

Despite her mission to put all these choices at parents' fingertips through technology, Chang encouraged inquisitive parents to go beyond the promotional materials if they want to know more about the camp structure. A self-directed child might fare better in a camp with more open-ended activities, she suggested.

"Call up the camp and have a conversation," she said. "Sometimes you can't get that sense from the website."

As far as what kinds of camps families tend to be choosing these days, Chang said that it varies widely, with some opting for the traditional outdoor camps and others going the more educational route, perhaps with a language-immersion program. With her own kids, Chang usually tries to "find something that ... helps to combat the summer brain-drain."

However, if there's any general observation to be made, Chang said it seems that parents want to reach some sort of a compromise between their children gaining knowledge and being entertained.

"If parents can do the cross-section between learning and fun, that's probably the magic spot that families are looking for," she said. ■



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Get into the swing of summer safety

Summer is a time of playground fun, swimming, boating, biking, camping and other outdoor activities. Unfortunately, these activities can lead to a higher risk of injuries.

In fact, according to the Safe Kids U.S. Summer Ranking Report, summer is known as "trauma season" among U.S. public health and medical professionals because unintentional deaths and serious injuries increase dramatically among children during these months.

"Sustaining a serious injury can be a life-altering event for a child," said Dale Stauss, chairman of the Board of Directors for Shriners Hospitals for Children. "We see patients every day with injuries caused by accidents, and we are committed to raising awareness about how to stay safe this summer."

The good news is that many of these injuries may be preventable. Here are some tips from Shriners Hospitals for Children to help your family enjoy a fun, injury-free summer.

Go Outside and Play

The physical and mental health benefits of outdoor play are great for children. It provides opportunities for exercise, creative expression, stress reduction and access to a free and natural source of vitamin D — sunlight.

Before sending kids out to play, make sure they always wear shoes to protect feet from cuts, scrapes and splinters, and wear sunscreen to protect from sunburns and harmful ultra-violet rays.

Playground 101

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports that every year emergency departments treat more than 200,000 children ages 14 and younger for playground-related injuries. Before your kids head to the

playground, keep these precautions in mind:

- Choose parks and playgrounds that are appropriate for their age and offer shock-absorbing surfaces.
- Teach children that pushing and shoving on the playground can result in accidents and injuries.
- Remind kids to go down the slide one at a time and to wait until the slide is completely clear before taking their turn. Teach them to always sit facing forward with their legs straight in front of them and to never slide down headfirst.
- Remind children to swing sitting down. Encourage them to wait until the swing stops before getting off and to be careful when walking in front of moving swings.

Make a Safe Splash

While playing poolside may be a blast, Safe Kids Worldwide reports that drowning is the leading cause of injury-related death for children ages 1 to 4 and it is the third leading cause of injury-related death among children 19 and under.

Additionally, University of Michigan Health Systems estimates that each year about 6,000 young people under age 14 are hospitalized because of a diving injury, with one in five sustaining a spinal cord injury. Prevent accidents and injuries with these tips to ensure your family's safety around water:

- Teach children to never swim alone or go near water without an adult present.
- Give children your undivided attention when they are swimming or are near any body of water.
- Always jump in feet first to check the depth before diving into any body of water.
- Never dive in the shallow end of the pool or into above-ground pools.

Fun on the Water

Boating, tubing and other water sports can be great fun but can also be dangerous. According to the U.S. Coast Guard, nearly 71% of all boating fatalities are caused from drowning, 85% of which are a result of not wearing a life jacket. Here is what you can do to enjoy the water safely:

- Always have children wear a Coast Guard-approved, properly fitted life jacket while on a boat, around an open body of water or when participating in water sports.
- Educate yourself. According to the U.S. Coast Guard, 86% of boating accident deaths involve boaters who have not completed a safety course.
- Always check water conditions and forecasts before going out on the water.

Fire Safety Simplified

In 2012, more than 136,000 children across the United States, including more than 67,000 children 4 and under, were injured due to a fire or burn and treated in emergency rooms, according to Safe Kids Worldwide. Use these tips to keep children safe around fires, fireworks, grills and other heat sources:

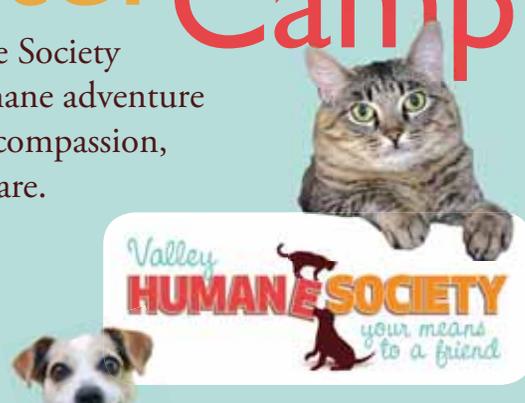
- Teach kids to never play with matches, gasoline, lighter fluid or lighters. Make a habit of placing these items up and away from young children.
- Do not leave children unattended near grills, campfires, fire pits or bonfires. Always have a bucket of water or fire extinguisher nearby whenever there is a burning fire.
- Take your child to a doctor or hospital immediately if he or she is injured in a fire or by fireworks. ■

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