



Camp Curiosity Grows Happy Campers

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Generations of youngsters learn while having fun at this local icon.
By Brenda Lange

The individualized attention lavished on each child was what first drew Debbie Linders to Camp Curiosity, and as her daughter grew, it was the “one-stop shopping” aspect of the child care center that kept her coming back—right through 7th grade summer camp.

“I interviewed several places, but this was the most unique and had the most to offer right on site and a variety of classes she could join as she got older,” Linders explains. “I worked full time and wanted to be confident she was in the best place.”

Debbie and Bob Linders and their daughter, Brooke, now 19, join thousands of other happy campers who have attended daycare, preschool, Kindergarten and summer programs at the camp, located on 55 acres in Plumsteadville.

Camp Curiosity was born 45 years ago as The Curiosity Shoppe, the brainchild of Ellen Thomas, a local teacher who recognized a need for a quality daycare facility for children.

“Mothers working outside the home weren’t so common then,” she remembers, and when she first suggested her idea to the Department of Education, she met with some resistance. But the only existing facilities offered very part time babysitting services, which didn’t help most working mothers. Eventually, her first facility on Dogwood Lane in Buckingham was opened and licensed from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. as a private school. She pushed again, and procured a license from the Department of Public Welfare called the toddler center to offer services to babies as young as three months.

About 15 years later, Thomas moved her operation to a farm on Landisville Road and started up one of three corporations—Camp Curiosity.

“We wanted the children to experience a farm environment, and we have beautiful grounds here,” she says. “We have a stream, pond, apple trees, fields, woods, courts for tennis, hockey and basketball and indoor and outdoor riding rinks.” She begins to list the many animals who call the Camp home: “Butterscotch the cow, Trouble, the miniature horse, Eeyore the donkey, Romeo and Juliet the ponies, Hannah, Belle, Dakota, Munchie, and eight more horses,” she ends with a chuckle.

Much more than the 3 R’s

The corporation has a staff of 17 highly-degreed professionals, with a curriculum for children beginning at age 3 and including Spanish, physical education and nature science classes. Even her youngest charges learn American Sign Language and music.

“I’ve been an educator for almost 50 years,” says Thomas, “and I know it’s very important for children to learn other languages. Spanish is the second most-used language in the country, and sign language is the third, so I targeted them.”

At the Camp, Español is not “taught” according to Thomas, but rather learned through play. “We don’t concentrate on memorizing vocabulary, rather we taste it, dress it and sing it, so the language becomes more meaningful to the child,” she explains. “We give them the desire to want to learn and have fun with the learning.”

Her younger son, Jeremiah, who works with her as the summer camp director, was a successful student of ‘play Spanish’ and is now fluent in the tongue.

“Languages are what I consider added value for the children, here,” says Thomas. “Our emphasis is always on what is best for the children. On science nights, for example, parents come in and do experiments with their children.”

At Camp Curiosity, preschool runs all year, however in the summer months, “everyone goes into camp mode,” Thomas says. 300 children and 70 staff enjoy the myriad outdoor activities in the summer, including art, horseback riding and swimming lessons.

Thomas has always included the family in the child’s education. “To me, the family is the most important key to our world. To keep them together and offer them the best we can to help them find everything they want for their children in one place, that’s why we are here.”

Camp Curiosity is located at 4425 Landisville Road in Doylestown. For more information, call (215) 348-7221 or visit www.campcuriosity.com.

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