

## Summer Academies Offer Unique Experiences! GRC Launches “New for 2004” Academy Americana

Curricula rich with offerings ranging from the well-known Space Academy to the ever-popular Ancient Academy (now featuring Egypt!) offer exceptional children opportunities for academic and personal growth unavailable anywhere else in the area.

### Learning to Learn

Gifted children tend to focus on proving to adults how smart they are rather than on the experience of learning itself, being well-rounded or developing healthy peer relationships. They expect to “be on top” and to prove it by earning scores as near to perfect as possible.

To counter these self-limiting tendencies, GRC’s Summer Academies are ungraded and students are empowered to explore their interests and transcend the confines of what they will be tested on.

As students discover that learning can be exploratory and fun, not simply linear or the means to an end, their motivation shifts from external approval to internal curiosity, from competitive to cooperative learning.

### Thinking Outside the Box

Not only are GRC’s Summer Academies ungraded, but the curricula emphasize trying new things, challenging projects, understanding connections and utilizing multiple approaches. Where else could academically gifted youngsters explore their interests in courses as rich, varied and interdisciplinary as these?

□ **Academy Americana**, GRC’s newest Academy, has been created to help students explore the rich heritage of our own America. The first course will enable history buffs completing grades 1-4 to recreate the novelty and excitement of St. Louis at the time of the 1904 World’s Fair. They will work together to dramatize a day at the fair. Adult collectors will share authentic artifacts with the fair-goers. Another expert will show the young historians and interested parents just where in Forest Park events at the fair were located and how they all related.

□ **Space Academy** and **Advanced Space Academy** will feature the most up-to-date space curriculum in the country.

GRC’s close connection to Washington University’s Mars Rover Team will allow young “space-heads” (as the NASA scientists call themselves) access to the most current data, photographs, questions and theories the NASA space-heads are dealing with. The Mars Rover team is headed by the #2 planetary geologist on NASA’s Mars Mission. Cadets enrolled in Space Academy or Advanced Space Academy and interested parents will be able to attend a special presentation about what we’ve learned from the Mars mission.

Students completing grades 1-5 will design their own space probe. Students completing grades 6-8 will also probe the politics of space exploration. Just who owns a given acre of space anyway, and how do you sell it?

There are different Mars-related curricula for each 2-week session of both Space Academy and Advanced Space Academy.

As always, each student makes and launches a personal model rocket!

□ **ECO Academy** keeps students completing grades 3-8 grounded in the complex realities of Mother Earth. They will learn to make the best suds in St. Louis without sacrificing our streams! Although the course will feature a lot of hands-on ecology, these young entrepreneurs will also organize a company, sell stock in it, manufacture, market and, hopefully, sell enough of their sudsy product to make a profit.

□ **Ancient Academy** enables historians completing grades 3-8 to explore life and afterlife in ancient Egypt. One two-week session will celebrate festivals while exploring the realities of daily life. The second session will focus on the afterlife, complete with mummies, cartouches and more.

□ **Junior Science Searchers** who have completed kindergarten will explore the disparate worlds of the dinosaurs, tropical rainforests, oceans and outer space. This Academy is a great way to introduce young children to the richness of GRC opportunities for academic and personal growth.

□ **Math, Marvels & More** allows children completing grades K-2 to explore probability and logic and experiment

*Summer Academies, continued on page 3*

## Dialogue with the Director

It is Springtime in the U.S.A. and the lazy, hazy days of summer are just around the corner. So I read another columnist's article bemoaning the loss of those halcyon days of former years when children could spend their time away from school just staying at home, playing whiffle ball in the streets until dark and using their unspent energy to discover the creativity that waited untapped in their minds. At first, upon reading such delightful accounts of burgeoning creativity made possible by long days of relative inactivity, I find myself nodding and feeling somehow sad over the loss of those remembered days.

But then, I start to wonder and remember for myself. Did those days really exist? Or are they more an aggrandized figment of our collective imagination during these hurried days of the 21<sup>st</sup> century? What is my *own* memory of those incredibly hot and humid summer days of the 50's during which I was an elementary student in St. Louis? Did I laze away my summer days in blissful inactivity? Maybe, in a way, I did. But are those actually the days that I see through my rose-colored glasses of memory? Truth be told, I'm not so sure!

Yes, as a child, I did have long summer days to fill with outdoor play and squabbling with my younger brother. I rode my bicycle to the library at least once each week to borrow another stack of books in which I would lose myself while reading for hours on end. But I also attended the inevitable "summer parks program" where I was expected to learn to swim and find my way midst a bevy of other children whom I didn't know. And I didn't have the luxury of hearing my mother call us in to lunch each day, because she was at work as a secretary. (Yes, even in the 50's!) But never fear, it's not that my brother and I were left to fend for ourselves exactly. My father had his office in our home, and he was usually close at hand in case of emergencies.

But do I long for those uninterrupted days of summer with fondness? No, not really. Was I ever bored? Absolutely! Would I have welcomed the opportunity to attend a summer program such as GRC's Ancient Academy or Space Academy? Without a moment's hesitation!

So perhaps these summer days of the 21<sup>st</sup> century *do* offer something better than the summers of the past! Gifted Resource Council certainly offers a multitude of opportunities for children to spend those hazy, hot days in pleasant and profitable activity.

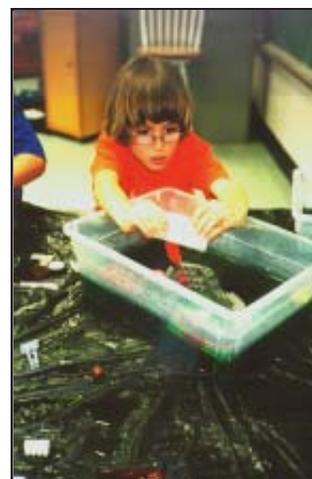
Students can explore everything from the wonders of outer space to the tombs of Ancient Egypt to the re-creation of life during the St. Louis summers of the 1904 World's Fair. Six and seven year olds can spend their days in the nurturing environment of Jr. Science Searchers or Math, Marvels &

More. Aspiring environmentalists and business entrepreneurs can mesh their talents and learn to share ideas and cooperate for the benefit of all during GRC's ECO Academy.

A child's creativity can be encouraged to blossom and their interests can be expanded each and every day. Hours and weeks can be spent without boredom! What a wonderful opportunity awaits children these days. I hope you'll consider allowing *your child* to spend their summer days with caring teachers and inquisitive peers at one or more of Gifted Resource Council's Summer Academies. Come find fun the GRC way....



*Sue Flesch, GRC executive director*



*Look at my robotic glasses!*

### *Summer Academies, continued from page 1*

with the velocity and frequency of electromagnetic waves while also developing their creative side.

□ **Physical Training** will be linked direct to each Summer Academy. Egyptians engage in mummy races, while world's fairgoers take a turn at the 1904 Olympics. Can we play basketball like they would on Mars? Of course, the key is activity and the byword is fun.

#### Special Relationships

Gifted children often feel estranged from their less talented peers, and this discomfort limits their opportunities to laugh and play, be silly or athletic, or even make casual conversation. Instead, they gravitate toward adults and concentrate on perfecting their special talents.

GRC's Summer Academies allow children to interact with others who are their intellectual peers and to form friendships with gifted students throughout the entire metropolitan area.

GRC's Summer Academies provide many students with their first experience of not being the best of the best. Determined to nurture talented students and fragile egos craving recognition as "the best," GRC teachers insist on cooperation, teamwork and creative, fun-filled approaches to problem-solving. As they learn to cooperate, students develop respect for one another, their ideas and therefore themselves!

#### Truly An Enriching Experience

GRC's Summer Academies offer students exciting academic enrichment opportunities and much more. Students have unique opportunities to work with others from many backgrounds and experiences who are their intellectual as well as chronological peers. These relationships, in combination with the carefully structured educational style, stimulate invaluable emotional and social development that are essential in order for children to be healthy and well-rounded.

To learn more details about GRC's Summer Academies, visit [www.cybam.com/grc](http://www.cybam.com/grc).



*Space Academy cadets intently watch an experiment with their captain.*

## Veteran GRC Teacher to Carry Olympic Torch

Barb Wnek, a GRC teacher since 1986, was selected to carry the Olympic torch in St. Louis. Wnek's run will be sponsored by Coca Cola. Around GRC Barb is known for the creative ways she involves students in physical activities. She herself has run 26 marathons and was selected third place winner in the nationwide 2003 Dole "Creative 5 a day" Teacher of the Year award.

## Students Benefit from Stellar Faculty

Gifted Resource Council structures the Summer Academies to provide students with valuable hands-on learning experiences and hires the finest teachers in the area to work with them.

Students in ECO Academy will benefit, for example, from the opportunity to be guided by Donna Crecelius, Ph.D, who has an impressive career as a scientist, teacher and teacher of teachers.

Dr. Crecelius did research at Washington University School of Medicine, published nine scientific papers, served as science facilitator for the Kirkwood School District, and currently serves as Co-Director of the Greater St. Louis Science Fair.

This is the third time Dr. Crecelius has taught GRC classes. "I am very happy to be returning to the Gifted Resource Council this Summer. The students are so enthusiastic and curious about the world of science. They are truly a joy to teach," she said.

"ECO Academy will give students an opportunity to participate in a truly multidisciplinary approach to problem-solving and follow all aspects of a project," Dr. Crecelius continued.

"The students will learn about the 'environmentally friendly' development of a product from beginning to end. They will complete the chemistry experiments necessary to design a product that is both effective and ecologically safe. Since their 'manufacturing plant' will be located near a stream, they will conduct water quality testing to assure that the processes involved in creating the product have not adversely affected the stream," she said.

Dr. Crecelius added, "Students with all types of talents and abilities will have a role in this academy. They will complete the chemistry experiments necessary to design the product, create the packaging, develop the marketing and sales campaign, and monitor the success of the product."

### Thanks to . . .

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### **Special Opportunities for Parents**

Parents of students enrolled in two of the Summer Academies may join their children for two unique activities.

- Academy Americana participants will tour Forest Park with an expert on the fair. "Fair V.I.P.s" (as the students will be known) along with interested parents will see just where everything at the fair was located and learn many details that only an expert would know on a specially designed bus tour of the World's Fair site.

- Space Academy and Advanced Space Academy students will be treated to a special update about the Mars mission by GRC Board member Rich Heuermann who works closely with the #2 planetary geologist in the NASA Mars project.

Details: time, date, place and fee to be announced. Parents must register in advance.

## How hard should we push our child to excel at school?

By Dennis O'Brien

Not as hard as you may think.

Parents of gifted children know that schools which fail to meet their children's academic needs are one of the main reasons their children underachieve, first as students, later as adults.

But parents who care too much and push too hard also cause gifted children to fail to excel.

Passionate, misinformed parents push their children to get top grades and raise their SAT scores in the mistaken belief that this will assure access to top colleges and guarantee a successful professional career.

But this is a blueprint for constricting a talented child's potential, not a recipe for success.

The combination of parents pushing children to strive after the wrong goals and schools failing to meet their special needs can be a lethal combination for gifted students. Many underachieve. Many fail to develop their potential to make a serious impact on the world. Some dropout.

Here's what parents can do to help a talented child thrive.

 Encourage your child's love of learning, not high-scoring.

There are many ways parents can nurture a child's love of learning, but emphasizing grades and test scores are not among them.

Nationally respected educator and researcher Sally Reis contrasts "creative, productive giftedness" which leads to significant achievement in life with "schoolhouse giftedness" which promotes rote learning and limits a child's horizons to what it takes to get the grade.

Reis, the principal investigator for the federally funded National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented, presented her findings at a conference on gifted students at the University of Missouri-St. Louis recently. Gifted Resource Council cosponsored the conference.

A commitment to nurturing "creative, productive giftedness" is one reason that GRC does not disclose scores or rankings for any of the competitions in Academic Challenge Cup.

 Show your interest in what your child is learning.

Appropriate questions communicate your values and nurture your child's own interest in learning. Instead of opening a conversation by asking, "How well did you do on your history test?" ask, "What interests you about ancient Egypt? Would you like to learn more about the significance for everyday life between the gods Hapi and Hathor? How could you do that?"

 Encourage your child to develop personal interests that go beyond the school curriculum.

This does not mean encouraging your child to join as many clubs and activities as possible "because it will look good on your college resume." It does mean nurturing your child's academic and non-academic interests, encouraging exploration and supporting risk-taking. Gifted students often do need encouragement to try something different, especially something which does not lend itself to easily identifying who's the best.

"Interests matter, perhaps more than anything else," Reis said. "Research indicates that the ability to have and sustain interests, including interests in several different areas, may be the best predictor of high levels of adult creative productivity."

 Encourage group activities as well as solitary pursuits.

Many academically talented children do quite well working alone and, when asked to team up with others, expect to dominate because of their ability. Not knowing how to cooperate seriously limits a child's chances for success in life.

That is why all Gifted Resource Council activities stress cooperation, teamwork and exploration of many options and differing opinions. Even GRC's Academic Challenge Cup (a friendly competition) recognizes students for their success in working with others.

 Encourage your child to participate in enrichment activities outside of school.

"Get children involved in challenging Saturday courses if they are not challenged in their own schools—as so many are not," Reis said.

Saturday Learning Labs are excellent opportunities for a child to be exposed to different topics that may develop into special interests. A child could take as many as four of these high-interest, hands-on 90-minute classes during the course of a school year.

 Encourage your child to pursue non-academic interests.

A passion for photography, dance, art, music or tinkering with electronics can also help a child develop the character traits which lead to "creative, productive giftedness" and success in life. Some passions lead directly to career choices. Others simply teach a child to plan, to attack a project aggressively, to persist and master a challenging interest for the inherent pleasure it brings them. Traits like these are better predictors of success than test scores or grades.

*How hard should we push?, continued on page 7*

*How hard should we push?, continued from page 6*

 Encourage your child to pursue passions in as much depth as possible.

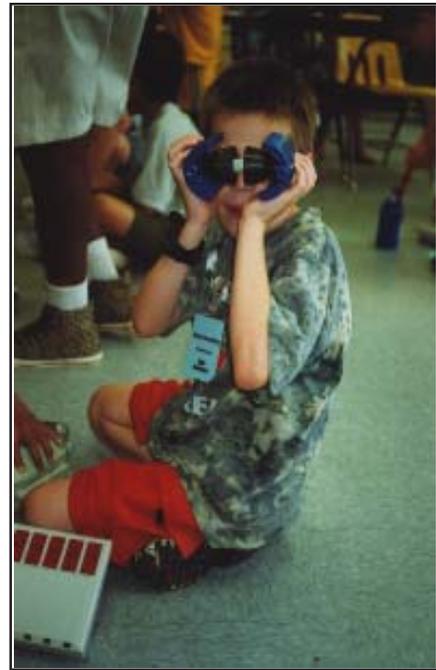
“Helping your child develop and sustain passionate interests is one of the most important things parents of gifted students can do,” said Reis.

GRC’s Summer Academies offer children opportunities to explore an area of interest in depth over a two-week and, in some cases, over a four-week period. The Academies are designed to challenge students to ask questions, research answers and possibilities, and produce a culminating demonstration product while working cooperatively with others.

 Allow your child’s interests to change.

An early interest in animal husbandry need not mean that a child should begin preparing for a career in veterinary medicine. It does mean she has found a motive that will help her develop skills, positive character and learning traits while preparing for the future.

*Dennis O’Brien is a licensed clinical social worker, experienced educator and therapist, and executive director of KidzLink, an organization serving medically fragile children.*



*A Scholar in Math, Marvels & More is enthralled by summertime learning.*

### BECOME A MEMBER OF GIFTED RESOURCE COUNCIL

Now **you** can participate in shaping America’s future by becoming a member of **Gifted Resource Council**, a not-for-profit education agency serving bright and talented young people. Your tax-deductible contribution will enable us to improve existing programs, extend offerings and reach more children. Your membership will not only benefit gifted children, but also entitle you to receive the following:

**Member: \$50**

- Priority registration for all programs
- \$10 discount off a Learning Lab registration
- FREE parenting classes*
- Use of GRC Library
- Free registration at selected workshops and lectures

**Friend: \$75**

- All of the above, *plus*
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**Sponsor: \$125**

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- Additional \$25 discount off a Summer Program (\$35 total)

**Patron: \$250**

- All of the above, *plus*
- One FREE Learning Lab course or
- Learning Lab scholarship in your name at your request

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**I am also interested in helping as a volunteer. Please contact me.**

**Please mail check to: Gifted Resource Council, 357 Marshall Ave., Suite 6, St. Louis, MO 63119-1827**

**GiftedResourceCouncil**  Spring 2004  Enhancing the potential of talented young learners

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informs the public about activities of Gifted Resource Council and about issues relevant to the development of bright and talented children and youth.

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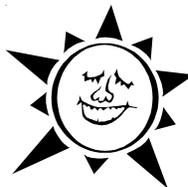
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**Summer Academies**  
June 14 - July 23  
will be held at  
**McNair School**  
8136 Groby  
(just east of the Innerbelt)



**Still a few openings!**  
**Call 314-962-5920 for details**

Gifted Resource Council is a not-for-profit education agency serving the greater St. Louis Metropolitan area. Its purpose is to bring together the resources of the community, the schools and parents to help bright and talented children achieve their potential.