

'It's really cool'

Students enjoy activities at Science Camp

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Carol Roehm/Commercial-NewsOlivia Williams takes a closer look at a tiny bone she recovered from an owl pellet Tuesday morning during the CSI science camp at the Danville Family YMCA.
Carol Roehm

DANVILLE – Several dozen children have been using their problem-solving skills for the past two weeks to crack the case at a crime scene during the CSI science camps at the Boys & Girls Club, the Danville Family YMCA and Mark Denman Elementary School.

The science camp has been a summer activity for the last 16 years in Danville.

Beth Chamberlain, a chemistry and physics teacher at Danville High School, said this year's camp teaches youngsters different problem-solving techniques they can use while they investigate the case of who stole the cookies and lemonade.

Fifty-two children in second through sixth grade participated at the camp in its first week at the Boys & Girls Club. This week, 39 school-aged children and another dozen youngsters at Mark Denman Elementary School will participate in many different activities with a forensic science theme.

“New this year is a third camp being held at District 118,” Chamberlain said, referring to an additional science camp during District 118's summer enrichment programming.

A cadre of teen and young adult mentors — ranging in age from high school sophomores to college seniors — helps Chamberlain run the camps.

Some of the activities the youngsters have participated in during the camps included analyzing their own index fingers to determine whether they had an arch, loop or whorl fingerprint, as well as examining shoe prints, lip prints and teeth prints; learning about blood; extracting DNA from a strawberry; and dissecting an owl pellet.

Chamberlain promised the two-dozen children gathered at the Y on Tuesday morning that they would work on “a lot more mysteries to help solve the crime scene.”

After carefully extracting DNA from a strawberry and placing it in a capsule to wear as a necklace, the youngsters turned their attention to something entirely different.

“Think of it as a little treasure hunt,” Chamberlain told the children.

Each child donned goggles and gloves to begin dissecting the blob in front of them.

Some youngsters thought it was an egg, but it actually was a barn owl pellet.

“Why are there all these bones?” My’Lashara Williams asked. “What part of the owl is this?”

Mentor Kyndal Cleveland had to break the news to My’Lashara: “It’s not part of an owl. It’s what the owl ate.”

Oliva Williams, My’Lashara’s sister, who was sitting next to her, stopped what she was doing and had a horrified look on her face.

Claudia Gonzalez, who also was sitting nearby, said, “Ewww.”

But My’Lashara was unfazed.

“It’s something an owl ate,” she said. “It’s really cool.”

At another table, mentor Serenity Porter told a group of boys that the pellet is “whatever the owl eats and doesn’t digest and throws back up.”

“It smells like a pet store,” one youngster, Lincoln Cravens, observed.

Another youngster, Phillip Morris, was excited to find a bird beak and rat teeth in his owl pellet.

Ace Sumila, however, hit the trifecta, finding a rat skull and two pocket gopher skulls in his owl pellet.

Ace said the best part of the science camp “was finding all the skulls.”

The science camp is sponsored by East Central Illinois Community Action Agency, Vermilion Advantage, Danville Family YMCA, Mervis Industries, Aqua Illinois, Enlightening Screen Printing, Danville Metal Stamping, Boys & Girls Club, Fiberteq, Meijer, Danville District 118 and International Greenhouse Company.