

WEST MIDLAND FAMILY CENTER Family Focus

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Thriving, Giving, Growing ... Together

Fall 2019

In This Issue

Everything About STEM Camp	1
Kiwanis Builds Imaginative Play Area....	1
Center is Family to Louise Fair	1
What Goes Around Comes Around.....	3
Jesse Traschen Joins Board.....	4
VanSumeren Excels as Intern.....	4

WMFC Kids love EVERYTHING About STEM Camp

Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) play a huge role in the programs we provide at the West Midland Family Center (WMFC). WMFC strongly encourages hands on learning and allowing kids to be creative and unique in their own way. Although STEM activities are intertwined in all programs that WMFC offers, we still seek out opportunities for kids to learn and try new things in a different setting.

The Midland Kiwanis Club aided in the cost of \$150 per kid to attend the camp and WMFC provided transportation.

“We have been doing SMEKplus camp for over 20 years and now there are tons of other STEM opportunities for students,” explained

...continued on page 2



SMEKplus Camp Graduates

This summer, the *Midland Kiwanis Club* helped WMFC sponsor 15 kids to attend *SMEKplus* (Science and Mathematics Extravaganza for Kids plus Engineering and Technology) Summer Camp at *Saginaw Valley State University*.

Kiwanis Club Builds Imaginative Play Area (For Real!)

Play is an integral part of a child’s physical and mental development. At the West Midland Family Center (WMFC) we strive to give children many different opportunities to incorporate play in their learning including hands-on STEM activities, indoor play activities, outdoor nature play and many more.



Midland Kiwanis Club Volunteers build stage.

...continued on page 3

Senior Center is “Family” to Louise Fair

Family...that is how *Senior Services of Midland County* participant, *Louise Fair*, describes the group of people at *Greendale Senior Services Center*. Louise has been involved at the senior center for 11 years. When she moved to *Shepherd* from *New Jersey*, she started visiting the senior center and taking advantage of the walks around the Center gym and playing cards. However, her favorite



Louise Fair

...continued on page 2



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WMFC Kids Love EVERYTHING About STEM Camp...continued from page 1

SMEKplus Camp Director Dr. Tamara Barrientos, “but we have not changed our original goal, which is student enrichment, not acceleration,” shared Barrientos.

“Hands on learning is strongly emphasized and we truly promote a camp feel with group activities and spirit days. Classes are taught by certified teachers from the Saginaw Bay Area and SVSU students serve as mentors.”



Morrison and Gavin measure the height of their wind tunnels at STEM Camp. (Photo by Jennifer Abraham)

“We want students to enjoy mathematics and science. Everything we do is project based,” continued Barrientos. “The engineering process requires kids to take steps to improve something that doesn’t work. They

ask themselves, ‘why not?’, or ‘what can I do differently?’ This year kids made rockets, drop packages, and wind tunnels,” stated Barrientos.

“The kids are able to gain experience working collaboratively to solve problems and explore STEM - quite often through the engineering design process. They also get the chance to meet new friends and learn from different teachers.”

The kids at the WMFC were anxious to attend STEM Camp. This was an opportunity, many of them may have never had if not for Midland Kiwanis Club and WMFC. Although the kids walked in with hesitation and nerves, all of them walked out the first day with a huge smile and a lot of energy. When asked what their favorite part of the day was they exclaimed “Everything!!”

With their smiles as evidence, it was easy to tell they had a great time. They truly enjoyed the projects



WMFC Students Grace and Ailinn, join other SMEKplus camp attendees in developing drop packages. (Photo by Anna Zurav)

they worked on and the things they created. STEM Camp taught them that science and math can be fun. Many see science and math as straight forward thinking but in reality the kids learned that math and science are tools that can be used to bring creativity to life.

“STEM is important for so many reasons, one of them being that STEM careers are very prominent today. We want young people to be prepared for their future,” concluded Barrientos.

Senior Center is “Family” to Louise Fair...continued from page 1

activity has always been talking with the other seniors.

“It has fulfilled my life. I have built connections here unlike any other place I have ever been,” shared Fair. “We support each other and care and pray for one another. The Center truly is a family.”



Card games can get wild and crazy at the senior center.

Louise has nothing but good things to say about WMFC and what it has to offer.

“WMFC not only

helps families,” stated Fair, “WMFC builds families.”

Last February the Senior Services of Midland County added a new member to the family, **Site Director, Nancy Smith**. Nancy is a retired fire fighter, bus driver, and senior center activities director. She is a proud mom of six children, two of which she adopted and have special needs. Nancy has a place in her heart for seniors and waited a long time to fulfill her dream of working and directing a senior center.

“Years ago I told the **North Midland Family Center Senior Services Director** that I wanted her job,” explained Smith. “Now thirty years later I am doing the job I always

dreamed of doing and I am enjoying every moment of it.”

Smith has built close connections with the seniors she serves. When asked about the seniors Smith responded with a big grin, “they just make me smile. I love sitting and listening to what they have to say.”



Nancy Smith

“I have big goals for Greendale Senior Center,” stated Smith.

“I want to keep coming up with fresh ideas and exciting events that keep people coming back for more. I also want to create a welcoming atmosphere that encourages new people to participate,” shared Smith.

Kiwanis Club Builds Imaginative Play Area (For Real!)...continued from page 1

With the idea of play and learning in mind, WMFC 3's **Preschool teacher Julie Smith** made the observation that although WMFC has many outdoor play opportunities



Ashlyn carefully balances on one foot to keep from falling, as the imaginary crocodiles hiss a warning from below.

for pre-school students none of them are easily accessible right outside the classroom.

"We have an indoor area to help improve gross motor skills and an outdoor nature play area that is a little farther from

the building, but nothing that is quick access," explained Smith.

With the new expansion of the pre-school wing in 2018 there was unused grass space right outside the preschool classroom doors, that was perfect for the imaginative play area that Julie envisioned.

"We proposed the idea to the **Midland Kiwanis Club** and they brought it to life," shared Smith. "Midland Kiwanis provided us with grant monies to finance the project as well as volunteers to do the physical labor of putting the imaginative play area together. The volunteers built three wooden tents, three bridges, two stages and six picnic tables for us."

"This addition to WMFC will be incredibly impactful for the kids," explained Smith. "Children learn through play and having a nature play area right outside our doors makes it super easy to bring our STEM activities and play time outside into a rustic and natural playground setting," continued Smith. "This gives the kids an opportunity to run and exercise their muscles in a more challenging way. The wooden structures are designed to emulate an all-natural environment which is uneven and different than a regular playground. It's something the kids are not used to so it works the decision making center of their brain. This new imaginative play area will

provide preschool students with an opportunity to practice skills that will make them Kindergarten ready." concluded Smith.

Thanks to Julie Smith and Stephanie Varner for your fresh and creative ideas that keep WMFC on the cutting edge when it comes to innovative methods of engaging children in new ways of learning. Much thanks to the Midland Kiwanis Club for their hard work and monetary support of this project!



Creative play includes hearing the sound of water on either side of the dock as you run alongside a friend.

What Goes Around Comes Around

Teen volunteers play an important role in the WMFC Summer Program. **Katelynn LeViere**, is one such example. With encouragement from her mom, **Joy LeViere**, Katelynn contacted **WMFC Connect and Serve Coordinator, Helen Roth** to begin volunteering in June 2018. Katelynn is familiar with WMFC, because her mom works in WMFC



Katelynn inspires children to work together.

Childcare and Katelynn has observed Joy in the classroom.

"I was considering education as a career, and wanted to get a look inside the typical day of a teacher," explained Katelynn. "My mom is the person who has always been there for me and has inspired me to do my very best. She's a hero of mine," continued Katelynn. "Helen is another person I admire. She knows I can be successful. She pushes me to do things that are out of my comfort zone while providing me with experiences that I'll use later in life."

"I've been privileged to work with Katelynn," commented Roth. "She's a responsible young lady who has a lot to offer. I feel a responsibility to help her see the great things she's capable of and to push her when

needed. I want to be someone she can count on and trust."

"My mom and Helen are strong female role models who have inspired me to do better in the world. I want to do the same for the kids I work with. I want them to know that I'm there for them no matter what and, that I'm someone they can lean on. This experience has made me more confident and outgoing and I am thankful that I had this opportunity," concluded Katelynn.

WMFC is thankful for Katelynn and all the other teens that take the time to learn from others and pass that knowledge and support on to the young people in our care.



Lilith explores the world of Chemistry and contemplates how it impacts everyday life.

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Jesse Traschen Joins WMFC Board of Directors

Jesse Traschen is the newest addition to the *WMFC Board of Directors*. Traschen is employed at *Bolger and Battle* where he works with strategic communications development and implementation.



Jesse Traschen

Traschen has been with Bolger and Battle for 20 years. Traschen was born in *Poestenkill, New York* and has been in Midland for 17 years. He graduated from *Yale* with a degree in history. Traschen is happily married to wife *Wendy*, who was a former WMFC Board Member. If Jesse is not working, he is either spending time with his seven grandchildren or four dogs (three of which were adopted from the *Humane Society in Midland*). If Jesse has time away from his busy life, you can find him playing tennis, going to the *Midland Center for the Arts*, or simply walking on the beach. Traschen got involved with WMFC after hearing “story after story from Wendy about the amazing things the Center does”. Traschen believes “it is both inspiring and a privilege to do something to help Greg and his staff”.

Alex VanSumeren Excels as WMFC Summer Intern

Not all interns are alike. Some are quite exceptional and truly special. This past summer *Alex VanSumeren* was a wonderful addition, and proved to be a valuable asset, to the *West Midland Family Center (WMFC)*. Working as an administrative intern Alex used her varied skill set to tackle a variety of different communication and marketing projects at WMFC. Alex currently attends *Aquinas College in Grand Rapids, MI* where she is majoring in both *Communications and Community Leadership* in hopes of one day working for a non-profit as a communications director. Alex grew up in Midland and will always consider Midland her home. Her family includes; parents *Mark and Leigh Anne*, sisters *Sami and Alyssa*, and a nephew due in October. Alex loves spending time with family and friends, listening to country music and exercising. She is passionate about volunteering and being involved in the community.



Alex VanSumeren

“WMFC is truly a family. Everyone has been so helpful and kind,” shared Alex. “I’m very grateful for each and every staff member. I’ve learned so much and I know the experience I gained here will help me pursue my future aspirations.”