

# True to Da Vinci, camps meld science,

The Da Vinci Experience camps offer youngsters an interesting blend of the two disciplines.

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Kids who attend the Da Vinci Experience day camp experience a camp curriculum that's a bit outside swimming and crafts. Sample topics include "Amazing Africa," "Mission to Mars" and "Crime Lab." Depending on which session they attend, campers alternately get to spend their time crafting warriors' shields, launching kid-safe rockets or experimenting with chromatology.

In South Portland, where a session of the camp takes place from Aug. 16 to 20, ancient Egypt is the subject. Kids will learn to mimic a fellow camper and make masks and replicas of Egyptian jewelry and headpieces. It is the first year the camp, started by Falmouth resident Judy Crosby, has been offered there. Its introduction into South Portland is a sign of its growing popularity in southern Maine.

Crosby started her summer camps around six years ago in an effort to unite the two halves of her professional life: science in the classroom and the professional world of art.

"My husband came up with the name. When I wanted to create something of my own, I wanted to combine science and art. And Da Vinci was a master at that," said Crosby, formerly a teacher in the Scarborough schools.

The camps introduce kids ages 5 to 12 to the world of science using a hands-on, creative approach. About 20 camps are offered in the communities of Falmouth, Scarborough, South

Portland, Raymond, Peaks Island and Cousins Island.

"Art lets a lot of kids understand more complex science concepts. It's good to combine the two. Some kids who are into science need exposure to fine arts. Others can find another direction and still be very effective learners in science," said Crosby.

A docent at the Portland Museum of Art for the last 10 years, Crosby remembers always opting for elective art classes while in college.

"I always liked art ... even though I took mostly science and education courses. Now I'm finally able to marry the two."

But science is at the core of her camps. At Jordan Small School in Raymond, the kids are digging in the dirt. But they aren't playing every once in a while a camper will unearth an object that might be a fossil. There is excitement at finding, Indiana Jones-style, what could be an archaeological treasure, then there is the puzzle of finding out what it could have been.

The camp teacher, Karen Gilman, and her assistants "planted" the fossils for the kids to find, Crosby said, but "the students will uncover the fossils themselves. They will do their own research and find out what it was. It is very hands-on and experiential learning."

The artwork comes in later in the week, when the kids make plaster-cast models of velociraptor claws and T-Rex teeth.

When Crosby began developing a curriculum for her Da Vinci endeavor, she knew she wanted to keep it fun. She follows the "inquiry" method, in which children ask questions and teachers help them find answers.

"Like in ancient Egypt campers will do a math unit using

## MORE ON DA VINCI

TO LEARN more about the Da Vinci Experience art and science programs, visit the Web site: [www.davinциexperience.com](http://www.davinциexperience.com).

skills with clay and painting. I have a huge library of topics I draw from." Every year, the Da Vinci Experience teachers discover more about what it takes to interest kids. "Seeing a child's face light up and that sparking curiosity about the world around them" makes it worth the effort, said Crosby. "It's amazing how much the really young students retain. Later parents come back and say that Johnny told me about all the detailed things he learned today."

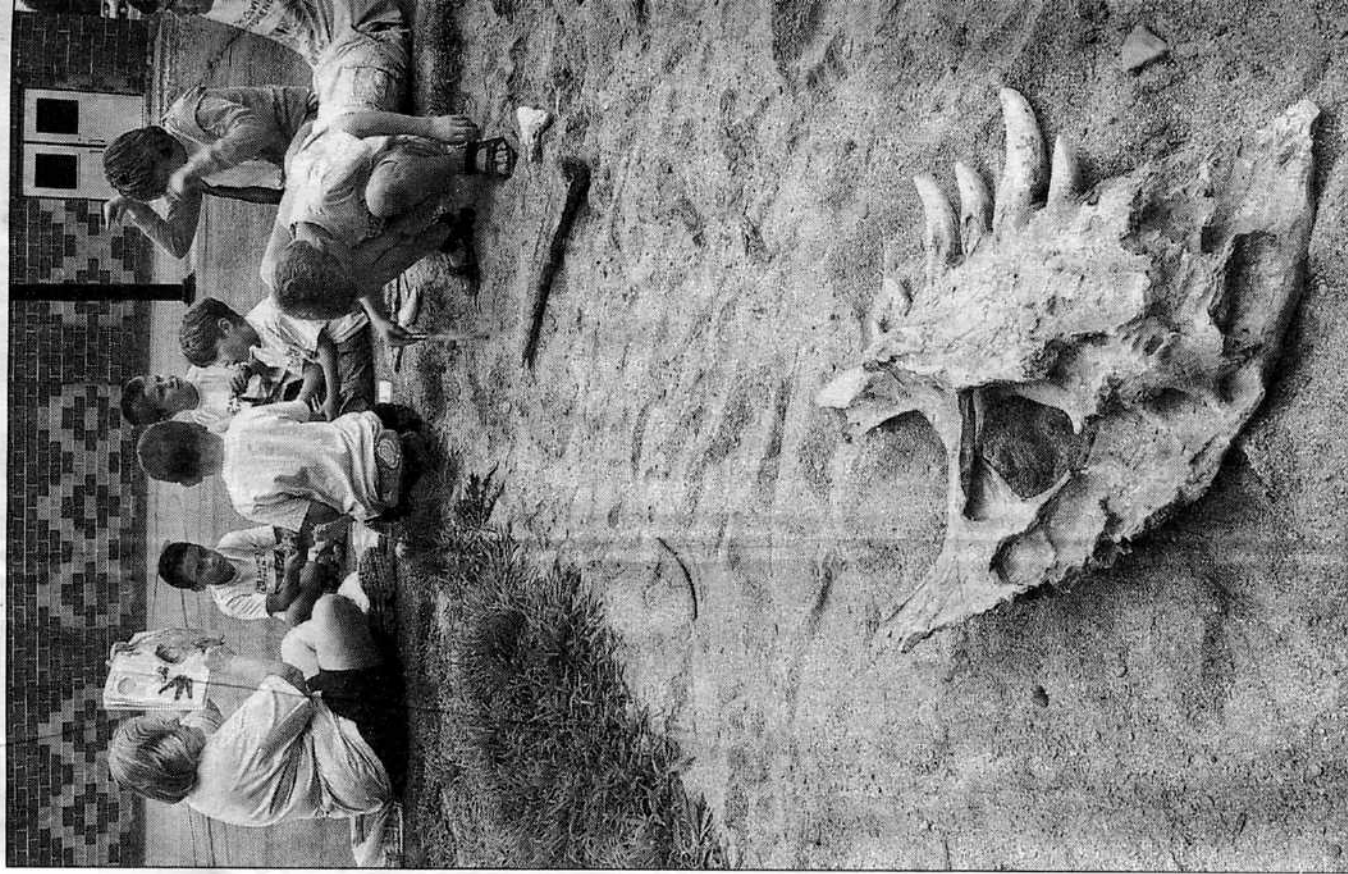
The backgrounds of the teachers vary widely. Heather Healey, who teaches camp in Falmouth and Freeport, for example, is a geophysicist with a teaching degree who has worked in the Los Alamos labs. Nancy Marino, who will teach the South Portland class, is a retired teacher with a degree in art and also a docent at Portland Museum of Art.

The South Portland camp is being offered through the town's community center. It still has a limited number of openings, as do many of the classes available in Yarmouth, York and Freeport. Class times are usually 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. and cost ranges from \$140 to \$170. Directions and introductions to staff members are available on the Web site.

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DaVinci Camp founder Judy Crosby, left, shows pictures of prehistoric fossils the Raymond session of the camp. A partial skull fossil of a tyrannosaurus is in the foreground. Crosby is in South Portland.