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A glimpse of Summer Camp in Moraga - 46 years ago

By Vera Kochan

The United States House of Representatives has designated July as Parks and Recreation Month, and in conjunction with that decree, the Town of Moraga issued a proclamation declaring the same during the June 28 council meeting.

A 46-year-old version of the Moraga Parks and Recreation Department's Activity Guide was discovered in Moraga's Historical Society archives. First of all, it differs greatly from today's "guide" in that it's not the nifty, colored booklet that residents are used to nowadays. Instead, the Midweek Sun's Wednesday June 8, 1977 issue included a full-page ad entitled "Moraga Parks & Recreation Presents Summer '77" with all of the class offerings listed on one page along with a description. There were no photos. Rather, townsfolk were forced to use their imagination when it came to classes such as "Tennis Anyone?" or "Watercolor Workshop."

The summer of 2023's classes/camps include: "Glee Club," "Chess," "Musical Theatre," "Movie/Film Making," "Skateboard Academy," "Soccer," "Cooking Round the World," and "Flag Football." There are also camps designed to foster success as children get older by building self-confidence, along with camps that use physics and engineering concepts. Some of the teen/adult programs offered include "Online Driver's Education," and a combo of "Fitness, Yoga & Meditation."

Director of Parks and Recreation Mackenzie Brady explained the many ways camps and classes are currently chosen for each summer. Sometimes a contracted instructor will make a proposal to teach a particular class; a popular class will often be offered again; staff will choose classes on topics that are trending; or classes will be chosen through public suggestion.

In 1977, nearly two generations ago, the youth in Moraga had much of the same interests as kids today. Classes such as: "Mini-Chef," "Rookie Soccer Clinic," "Arts & Crafts," or "Drama Workshop" were on the summer camp "menu."

"Tennis Anyone?" allowed students to "take advantage of Campolindo's newly lighted courts." A "Jazz Dancing Clinic" urged students to "bring lots of energy and a snack, too." Girls, grades 4 - 6, were offered "Pom-Pom and Cheers," which was "back by popular demand."

A class called "Think Thin - Teens Only" with a description that demands, "It's time to get in shape - bring a friend - think thin!" might not fit in today's climate of downplaying a perfect body image. And while this class did not specify girls only, there was a class geared to teenage boys called "Weight training - Strength Building For Young Boys" that promised "test measurements will be taken."

A practical class for women and teenage girls was "Self Defense" that incorporated Aikido, Karate and Jiu-Jitsu techniques. Ironically, strength and size were not critical in this instance. Another class that was workout related was "Tumbling," and students were advised to "wear loose shorts."

A very practical class was offered for teens that would soon be off to college. The "Surviving on Your Own" description posed some heavy-duty questions to teens who think they are ready for life away from home. "Are you going to know what to do when you leave home and are on your own? Will you be phoning home to find out why your white clothes came out of the washer blue and your blues came out white? Will you know better than to go into a self-serve gas station and fill up your gas tank with water? Will you know how to establish credit and balance your check book?" With scare tactics like these, it's a wonder that teens ever left the house.

An "Outdoor Camp" for girls and boys aged 9-12 taught kids to learn about nature, develop camping skills, and explore the creeks and woods at the Hacienda de las Flores. While three of the days were morning sessions, the last was an overnight camp-out. Parents were assured that after the camp was set up and everyone fixed their own dinner, the kids would "spend the night totally supervised." Forty-six years later, it's comforting to know that some things never change.

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