

The Bethel Citizen

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By ALISON ALOISIO

A new summer camp that hopes to draw 300 kids and their families to Bethel will open on the Gould Academy campus this year.

The Bethel Camp for the Arts will utilize a variety of business and natural resources in the area, according to director Rick Mades.

As the name implies, the camp will offer activities including theater, music, dance, pottery, drawing, and sculpture.

But it will also offer such activities as robotics, rocketry, golf, kayaking, mountain biking and tennis.

The camp's purpose, said Mades, is to provide a combination of enrichment activities and non-competitive individual sports.

Two, two-week sessions are planned for this summer.

The camp, said Mades, will "fill a needed void in the summer camp industry. Two-week camps are difficult to find. And it's non-competitive — a lot of kids don't fit in at regular camps."

Youngsters between the ages of 8 and 14 may attend.

Over the next three to four years, Mades said, he hopes to work up to having between 130 and 140 kids a season.

He plans to utilize the nearby Bethel Inn Country Club for golf activities, as well as the BIG Adventure Center's climbing wall.

His website: (www.maineartscamp.com) also lists about a half dozen area lodging places. "We'll have parents coming in and dropping off kids," he said.

The sessions will take place in June and July. Each session costs \$2,250.

Mades has been in the summer camping business for 27 years. He spent a total of 16 summers at three camps in Maine.

For the past decade, he has operated Camp Finders, a service that matches kids to the right summer camp for them. He is originally from Maine, but is now based in Florida.

About a year ago, Mades researched possible sites in New England for the new camp.

Bethel offered the right combination of school campus facilities and nearby resources, he said.

"It's a neat little town. I really loved it," he said.

Mades said he already has heard from families in Ohio, New Jersey and Florida who are interested in having their children attend.

And, he said, "We've had parents keep asking, 'Can we go?'"

The question has prompted him to plan a family session at the camp during its second season.

Family camps are rare, he said, "especially on a school campus. It's more attractive with the dorms, because there's more privacy and comfort."

Dutch Dresser, Gould's associate head of school, said the school looks forward to hosting the camp.

"Gould is very pleased to have its excellent facilities used in support of a program focusing on young campers and the arts," he said.

Robin Zinchuk, executive director of the Bethel Area Chamber of Commerce, also said she is happy to see the camp come to town.

"Not only does it offer an additional option for local families, but it is bound to attract new visitors, parents and families to the Bethel area," she said. "The director is actively seeking business partnerships throughout the community, which is very strategic. This new venture will benefit many."

There will be an open house for the camp on March 6 from 1 to 3 p.m. at Gould.