

Sun Journal

New kids' camp encourages creativity

By **Lindsay Tice**, *Staff Writer*

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BETHEL - Many kids know that overnight camps have certain basics.

Swimming. Hiking. Old, wood cabins, sometimes with running water, most often without. Long summer sessions with campwide competitions capped by Parents Day.

But a new summer camp in Bethel won't offer anything so conventional. And its creator is hoping that's exactly what will draw campers in.

Starting this June, the Bethel Camp for the Arts will open with two, two-week sessions for kids 8 to 14 years old who want some time without competition. Campers won't be pressured to join a group, chose a side or get a high score.

Instead, activities are created to be fun and educational, ranging from clowning to creative writing. Athletics are limited to individual sports, such as rock climbing, mountain biking and yoga. And while traditional camps usually have several mandatory campwide activities, such as group hikes and cabin contests, the arts camp won't. Campers will choose all their own activities.

"We're not even offering team sports, because that's not what we're geared toward," said owner and creator Rick Mades.

Although it isn't affiliated with Gould Academy, the camp will use the private school's dorms and other facilities. That means hot water and electricity instead of log cabins.

Because there's no pool on the campus, there will be no swimming. But campers will be able to kayak on nearby Songo Pond or take golf lessons at the Bethel Inn and Country Club.

Mades, who grew up attending and working at summer camps, came up with the idea a couple of years ago. As the owner of Camp Finders, a consulting group for parents, Mades discovered that most camps were sports-oriented, competitive and limited when it came to arts.

Most were also long, offering only four- or eight-week sessions. Some allowed campers to stay for only two weeks, but didn't tailor their programs for those kids. Short-term campers often missed out on special events or trips.

"Families are looking for certain things that aren't being met in New England," Mades said. "People need a balance. Kids need a balance."

His camp will be dedicated to the short-term camper, with trips and events scheduled around a two-week session. Campers can stay longer if they want.

A Gould Academy music teacher, two nurses and members of the food staff have signed on to the staff. Mades is hiring experts and professional artists to fill out the rest of the staff.

The camp will hold an open house from 1 to 3 p.m. Sunday, March 6, at Gould Academy.