

Computer camps provide a fun and educational option



By Peter Menyasz

March Break is only about a month away, and a computer camp can provide an excellent solution for parents seeking a fun and educational activity for their school age children.

The City of Ottawa, together with FutureKids, is offering four different computer camps over the March 15-19 school break that provide some convenient options in terms of both content and location. The camps are based on a half day of computer work and a half day of regular camp activities, including sports and crafts.

Two of the week-long camps are being offered at John McRae High School in Nepean, each at a cost of \$247.50.

The Robotics I camp, aimed at 10- to 13-year-olds, involves building machines out of LEGO parts and then hooking them to a computer and controlling them with software programs written by the campers themselves. No LEGO-building or computer programming experience is required, and the program provides an excellent introduction to programming, including design of a graphical user interface (GUI).

A Digital Movie Maker Camp, recommended for ages 10-14, is also offered at John McRae, with campers storyboarding, shooting, and editing a short video movie that is ultimately burned onto a DVD to bring home. Campers are introduced to pre-production planning and post-production work, including sequencing, editing, and adding sound, music, titles and credits. Special effects are a key focus of the program, and campers are introduced to how these work in real movies.

Two camps, again with different themes, are being offered this March Break at Glen Cairn Community Centre in Kanata, each costing \$192 per camper.

The Claymation Mania camp allows campers to create their own claymation characters and movie, building sets and props, doing claymation filming, editing their footage, and creating a final DVD to bring home. The camp is described as “extremely hands-on”, and while it’s somewhat less technical than most of FutureKids’ camps, the material provided is all professional quality.

Game Maker Extreme, meanwhile, offers fanatical computer gamers a chance to design their own game, which will be ready to bring home and potentially develop further, as all campers are provided with the development software for later use. The games that can be design include sophisticated features including health meters and collision detection, and campers create their own graphics for the games. The course is described as both user-friendly and challenging, and the programming environment is object-oriented and supports both scripts and a range of advanced features including 3-D.

All of the camps are based on attendance between 9:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m., although free supervision is available for campers from 8:00-9:00 a.m. and from 4:00-5:00 p.m.

Details on the computer camps are available at http://www.futurekidsottawa.com/schedule_march.htm and registration can be done by telephone (613-580-2588) or on-line at http://ottawa.ca/residents/parks_recreation/programs/guide/registration_en.html. Registration opened January 20th.

* * *

Teaching children about money and finances can be a tricky thing, but the New Brunswick government has developed a financial literacy program, which is also available on-line (<http://www.makeitcountonline.ca>), that can be a huge help.

The program, Make it Count: A Parent’s Guide to Youth Money Management, shows parents how to model and teach behaviour that encourages children to develop healthy financial habits, providing tools, tips, and activities on responsible money management. It also offers advice for parents on how to incorporate teaching financial skills into everyday family activities.

“We know that talking about money is considered uncomfortable by parents and boring by kids,” says Rick Hancox, executive director of the New Brunswick Securities Commission. “This program helps engage youth in the discussion. We

believe that responsible financial management habits learned at an early age will carry on into adulthood.”

A survey conducted by the Canadian Securities Administrators in 2009 found that a majority of parents claim to be at least somewhat confident in their ability to teach their children about personal finances and investing, Hancox said. But although 80 per cent of parents agree with the importance of passing along personal experiences and insights to their children and that teaching children financial skills is one of the most important things parents can do for a child, a majority have not actually done it, he said.

The tools on the Web site, which are available in both English and French, include suggestions for including financial training during family activities – for example, at a supermarket, financial institution, shopping mall, or restaurant.

There are also sections on investing in education, saving money around the home, budgeting, earning money, setting goals, and online safety, as well information on key financial milestones – first cell phone, first job, first day of school, birthdays, and family vacations. A “fun with friends” section provides information on recreational spending and giving back to the community through fund-raising or volunteering.

This article originally appeared in the _____ 2010 issue of Capital Parent Newspaper.