



Kids climb, clown, cavort and compute at this camp.

Some parents are surprised to learn that their children are using Photoshop.

By Barbara Gibson

If kids ruled the world, it might look something like [Steve and Kate's Camp](#) in Mill Valley, California. There, in addition to making movies, music and photos on iMacs and eMacs, campers can ride around in limos or on horses, play roller hockey, climb the rock wall, juggle, swim, sew, woodwork, play lacrosse, stilt walk, play chess, make jewelry, tie-dye, moon bounce, sculpt with balloons, dance, bake, hunt treasures, paint, read, play miniature golf, make lanyards, sing in a chorus, play bingo, throw pots on potter's wheels — and throw pies.

All of this, say Steve and Kate Susskind, “will look good on your child’s resume.”



Art Residue. Savannah shows what her hands look like after using the pottery wheel to make her parents a special treasure.

Controlled Chaos

Steve and Kate are able to offer this smorgasbord of fun to children in grades K-7 each summer, thanks to their ingenuity. Macs and FileMaker Pro database software for Mac OS X. “It takes an extremely organized and highly structured system and programs,” Steve says in a more serious tone, “to enable all the flexibility and choice. The folks who are using the camp don’t really see that; it’s sort of transparent. But we couldn’t run the camp any other way.”

Unlike camps that require weekly commitments, Steve and Kate’s Camp allows parents to purchase any number of days, from one to 49, per child, without having to lock in attendance dates. “As long as the kids have days in their account, they can



Group Picture. Steve and Kate team up with the kids for the daily picture that is sent to the parents using iPhoto.

“Before we computerized on the Macs,” Kate explains, “we would have to look through books and go back to paper records to answer a question. Clipboards aren’t alphabetized, so we had to rifle through them to see who’s there. Now we print a daily attendance list, so we know exactly who is here. Also, parents can ask us a question about something and we can find the information right away. We can even go into the system and enter a friendly reminder about something, or lost-and-found alert. When the parent comes to sign out a child, the alert comes up automatically.

“You can’t do something like that with paper unless you’re willing to make your customers wait a really long time,” Steve says.

Macs for Fun

In addition to managing the camp using Macs, Steve and Kate provide Macs for the crowds of kids who want to make their own music videos, help produce movies about a stuffed crocodile and a rubber chicken for Camp TV and morph pictures of campers and staff in Photoshop 7. “The office is plastered with 8 x 10 digital images of camp activities,” Steve says. “When parents see the pictures, they say to their children, ‘I want you to do that today.’”

come any day they like and are guaranteed space. If they don't use all the days they purchase, we automatically refund the fee for the days they don't use. That really works for families with constantly changing schedules."



Sports Activity. The kids play on the outdoor equipment before lunch time.

Managing by Mac

In order to offer this kind of flexibility, Steve and Kate rely on FileMaker Pro running on an iBook to schedule activities, monitor attendance and handle administrative duties. "We serve nearly 300 children a day, and we have to know who's here, who is authorized to pick up a child and what particular needs a child has. If Sally is deathly allergic to peanuts, if Johnny needs sunscreen, if Andrea is taking medication, we need to know that."

Camp staff greet children arriving each day, sign them in at one of four iMacs and iBooks. They're wirelessly linked to the iBook server via AirPort. If it's a child's first day, one of the counselors shoots a digital picture, stores it in iPhoto and downloads it to the database. "We keep a picture of each child in the database so we can connect the face to the person standing on the other side of the computer." When they sign in, children also order lunch — pizza, burritos, burgers, pasta or sandwiches. FileMaker Pro takes the order.



Checking In. Sarah checks in with the camp counselor and requests her favorite lunch, pizza.

Kate uses iPhoto to email parents digital images of their children. "It's been such a great tool. Normally, we would have to import and export images, but I've been able to use iPhoto directly and just email parents. They're delighted when we email them a picture of their child at camp doing something."

"It's exciting showing the kids what these computers can do," Steve adds. "We've got a recording studio with an actual recording booth built around a Mac and Digidesign's [Pro Tools](#). The kids sing to karaoke soundtracks, and we record right into the computer. Then we burn the music in iTunes so they can go home with a CD of their own singing."

Some parents are surprised to learn that their children are using Photoshop. "We like to give kids tools that adults would use so they can experience what's possible. Photoshop hasn't intimidated them at all; they have no trouble putting themselves on carpets flying over the Golden Gate Bridge."

Letting Loose

Steve, who says he "chose to study child development at Cornell University over circus arts at Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Clown College," and Kate, who grew up in Australia and has a degree in Human Biology from Stanford University, have operated the camp since 1980. It operates every year at capacity, with some children attending the entire summer and others just a few days.

In any case, it's a place to let loose — within a well-defined structure.

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