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Having fun while learning



COURTESY PHOTO

Challenge initiatives provide a fun and educational experience for students.



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Rafters with North American River Runners scream as they hit the Fayette Station rapid on the New River Thursday in Fayetteville. World-

class whitewater is just one of NARR's resources for developing teams and individuals.

Youths develop teambuilding through outdoor adventure

By Fred Pace

REGISTER-HERALD BUSINESS EDITOR

Leave behind standardized testing, textbooks and pencils – it's time to have fun while learning. North American River Runners in Hico offers a program that uses outdoor adventures to develop teambuilding among youths.

"Our teambuilding program utilizes outdoor activities to support, energize and develop healthy young minds and bodies," NARR president and founder Frank Lukacs said. "There is power in facilitated outdoor group experiences."

The "TAG" program uses rubber chickens, slingshots, duct tape, noise and a variety of other items and activities to challenge students to boldly dive outside normal boundaries and have new and unique experiences outside the classroom.

"We value the opportunity to provide these experiences to today's students," Lukacs said.

TAG stands for Teambuilding, Adventure, and Growth, Lukacs said. The program hosts more than 2,000 students of all ages each year.



"We wanted to tie in Bible teaching with activities out in nature," said Kari Gathany, Girls Club director for Youth For Christ in Elkhart, Ind.

The youth group's program began with a rope course and rappelling the first day, whitewater rafting the second day and ended with paintball games on the last day.

"The NARR program was outstanding," Gathany said. "All of our goals were achieved."

Gathany said they all learned a lot about themselves.

"TAG facilitators encouraged us to come together as a team and work together," she explained. "Everyone learned a lot and we had fun at the same time. We are already talking about going back to NARR again."



Vivian Langefeld, education director of Montessori Middle School in Lexington, Ky., brings a new group of students to NARR each year.



COURTESY PHOTO

High challenge elements give participants the opportunity to step beyond their normal limits.

"The Fall Odyssey trip to NARR base camp has always been a favorite of our students and teachers," she said. "The staff at NARR have always been eager to assist in planning for our individual needs and is experienced in outdoor-based and challenge by choice education."

The Lexington students' weeklong trip includes a team course, a high ropes course, a giant swing, a climbing wall, rappelling, hiking, story telling, a participatory music program provided by mountain musicians, volleyball, basketball, orienteering games, whitewater rafting and riverside camping.

"Exercises in the development of self-esteem, group dynamics, trust and cooperation, and teambuilding are woven throughout the program, allowing students to develop a better understanding of self, others and the world around them," Langefeld said.

"Each day begins and ends with activities designed to build the large group, with small group activities in between. Our goal is to begin to build a community where every student will be part of an inclusive environment that allows him or her to feel safe and comfortable for the optimal learning experience. Students learn, have fun and build lasting relationships."



Lukacs said each organization or group that uses the TAG program has a different set of goals.

"Each of our programs are custom-designed to meet those diverse needs," he said. "Many outdoor activities are used to help each organization to achieve its goals."

Lukacs said whitewater rafting is used for teambuilding.

"Putting a group of youths into a raft is a naturally innovative teambuilding experience," he said.

Under the observant eye of a trained guide, a team of four to eight participants has the task of maneuvering their raft through an area of the New River appropriate for their age group, Lukacs explained.

"Whitewater rafting provides high-energy activity that places youth in a work-together situation," he said. "They face the forces of nature to enhance their appreciation of our physical environment, develop communication skills and value the advantages of working as a team."



Other activities include a treetop high and low rope course that provides an opportunity for youth to face, attempt and conquer a series of challenges. A map and compass program teaches basic orienteering skills while providing a creative look into necessary life skills.

There is also a night hike program in which youth embark on a short hike. The facilitator provides a series of night specific activities ending with a bonfire.

"The common thread to these and other experiences found in the TAG program is for youth to share experiences outside of their normal routines," Lukacs said. "They are challenged to see common things in new ways, to have more confidence in their own abilities and to trust in their teams. They are usually amazed by what they can accomplish. Our program will exercise a student's body and mind while they are having fun."



For more information about North American River Runners and its youth teambuilding program, call 1-800-950-2585 or visit the Web at www.narr.com.

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