

SOAR celebrates a summer of outdoor adventure and fun

BY KATHERINE LAZARUS

BRANDON — The SOAR program, or “Success through Opportunities, Academics and Recreation,” celebrated the end of its five-week-long summer camp this past Friday, Aug. 6 with a camp-wide party featuring two water slides, face painting and climbing on the playground. Leaders capped off the party with a BBQ lunch of hot dogs, burgers and chips.

Seventy-five kids first grade through seventh arrived at the Neshobe Elementary School from 10:45 a.m.-4:45 p.m. each day from July 5-Aug. 6 to participate in this year’s camp. Summer themes at the camp included exploring insects, nature and mindfulness, and caring for the community.

“It went incredibly,” said SOAR Director Nancy Bird, 59, who has been director for 12 of the 17 years SOAR has run. “It’s fun, it’s safe and the kids had an absolute blast. That’s what parents want and need, and it’s simple which is the key.”

Sixteen staff, including three staff that helped one-on-one, made arts and crafts and played in the summer sunshine with children from Neshobe Elementary, Otter Creek Academy, and Lothrop Elementary.

In a swimsuit herself, staffer Amanda Bliven, 32, from

Middlebury, said of her first year being a leader at the SOAR camp, “I love it, it’s the best job ever. It was so much fun being a kid again.”

An intervention specialist at Neshobe, Bliven’s favorite thing was, she said, “connecting with the children, showing them new things and doing activities with them.” Also, she said, “getting away from technology, going out and just having fun with other people.”

The exciting goings-on included hiking, taking a field trip to Pittsford Recreation Department, playing musical chairs with up to 19 kids at one point, and hunting for mushrooms.

Of the many kids who had fun on the water slide on Friday was 12-year-old Alyssa Wade from Brandon, who has been going to SOAR camp since she was in the first grade and is now going into seventh. “I know all the kids here,” Wade said. Her sister, Amanda, 10 years old and going into fifth grade, was also at the

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While Alyssa will age up next year and not be able to attend the SOAR program, Nicholas Savela, who is “eight and a half” and from Sudbury, he said, with a huge smile from the slip n’ slide whose long line snaked through the field. “I liked helping

and doing the community service,” Savela said of his time at camp. He plans on seeing some of his SOAR teachers in school this year and, at the very next year at camp.

With hungry stomachs from playing and learning, the kids ran to get lunch from leader Evan Diaz, 19, who is from Brandon. He substitutes during the school year at the same school he attended as a kid, though he did not go to camp.

“It went really well,” he said of the camp. “A lot of kids have been able to test out their own interests with a wide variety of outdoor activities and crafts,” Diaz explained, as he flipped burgers and rolled over hot dogs while the kids got in a long line heading for the lunch table.



SOAR CAMP LEADER Evan Diaz, 19, from Brandon, flipped burgers and hotdogs in the hot sun for kids celebrating their last day. “It went really well. A lot of kids have been able to test out their own interests with a wide variety of outdoor activities and crafts,” said Diaz, who is a substitute during the school year.

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DIRECTOR NANCY BIRD, 59, on the left, who has led 12 out of the 17 summer sessions SOAR has put on, crosses the field to help prepare lunch as kids laugh and play on the Wild Rapids water slide on Friday, Aug. 6.