

The Vindicator

Summer camp with a twist at JCC



Hannah Watts, 8, of Cortland and Tyler Hawkins, 8, of Liberty take part in JCC summer camp Wednesday.

YOUNGSTOWN — Tyler Hawkins, 8, of Liberty and Hannah Watts, 8, of Cortland, were among the many children running around Noah's Park playground on Wednesday at the Jewish Community Center, 505 Gypsy Lane.

The JCC started its annual summer children's camp last week, with changes to comply with guidelines by state and county health departments due to the coronavirus.

Tyler and Hannah, who like the other children probably were not aware of the changes, said they were both excited to be outside playing after having had to spend more than two months inside their homes and out of school because of the virus outbreak.

Some changes that had to be made were to focus on smaller groups of children being together for social distancing and also canceling all off-campus field trips.

Michael Rawl, JCC executive director, said the summer camps kicked off June 1 as originally planned.

“That was our original planned start day, which we were able to keep since the governor allowed camps to reopen then,” he said. “Because of our other operations during the pandemic, we were operating the essential worker child care and the mobile meals program, which allowed us to have staff on hand doing that work while also preparing for the camp — with the hope it would happen, which it did.”

He said the state issued health guidelines to operate the camp safely and had approved the JCC to have a temporary child care pandemic license in March. This allowed programs for children to be run under restrictions such as limiting class sizes to six children, not mixing classes and teachers, and children and teachers being quarantined to rooms during designated times.

Rawl said the summer camp one of the main modifications is canceling all field trips due to transportation issues and the challenge of going out into the public in large groups.

“We were able to maintain a number of the specialty camps, which can be done safely such as art-related, horseback riding, and e-sports camp with competitive video gaming, and the having swimming at the 400,000-gallon outdoor swimming pool at the 7-acre Logan Camp site in Liberty,” Rawl said.

There is also limitation on group sizes to nine campers with the same camp counselor at a time in a location.

“We are going in smaller groups there more frequently this summer because we do not want to overcrowd the pool and need to transport smaller numbers of children,” Rawl said.

Andy Lipkin, Youngstown Area Jewish Federation executive vice president, said keeping a certain number of children together and not mixing classes helped to keep children and families safe from March to May.

He said pandemic child care was provided for children of essential workers of Heritage Manor and Levy Gardens and eventually also included children of essential workers at other places in the community.

Lipkin said with the outdoor swimming pool, there are different days for bringing different groups of children to swim instead of how it was done last year, when all children went on the same day.

“We bring the children in much smaller groups as well as social distancing when in the pool,” Lipkin said.

Three large tent areas were set up on the main campus near the playground to allow groups of children to be in different areas including for lunch and craft and arts activities.

Madeline Long, 11, of Leetonia, who had completed a chalk drawing on the cement, said: “It is a lot of fun to get to be here with others.”

Madeline and others were running around and throwing water balloons to cool each other off with the 90-degree temperatures this week.

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