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TOP STORY

EDITOR'S PICK

College students join forces with Grout Museum District to plan summer camps

Holly Hudson Hill

Apr 26, 2025



Grout Museum District Education Director Benjamin Miller presents the "Dragon's Breath" science demonstration.

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WATERLOO — Benjamin Miller dons his safety goggles, lifts the canister of liquid nitrogen and pours it into a container of boiling water. A dramatic, thick cloud forms and rolls across the table.

Miller, the education director at the Grout Museum District, has just completed the “Witch’s Brew” science demonstration at the Bluedorn Science Imaginarium, showing how the nitrogen at a temperature of -320 degrees and the water at a temperature of 212 degrees interact.

This and other demonstrations will be part of the Grout’s summer camps.

While the district has offered weeklong summer camps for years, this is just the second year of single-day camps for children ages 6 to 12. For many area families, the camps serve as a child care option over the summer months.

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This year, Grout staff were offered a helping hand when students from the University of Northern Iowa’s Nonprofit Leadership Alliance reached out to them.

During the fall semester, students in the UNI program contact area nonprofit organizations to see what their needs are. This year, students chose three of those organizations to assist, the Cedar Bend Humane Society, Grow Cedar Valley and the Grout.

Emma Larsen, a junior at UNI from Twin Lakes was the contact for the student group.

“There were five of us responsible for the Grout service project,” she said. “I was the primary connection, so I would communicate with Benjamin.”

Larsen brought a lot of summer camp experience to the assignment, having previously worked at Bible camp back home.

The students — Larsen, Meg Gillins of Cedar Falls, Dannah Karolus of Perry, Nyx Mayberry of Northwood and Katy Roose of Pella — met with Grout Executive Director Margaret Moye and toured the district.

They were given outlines that described what the Grout was looking for.

“We planned two of the weeklong camps and four of the single-day camps,” Larsen said. “We helped come up with themed games, crafts and even snacks. It was a lot of fun, and the Grout gave us a lot of freedom to explore ideas.

“It was really cool and really an honor just to work with these professionals and offer them a unique perspective. It made a real impression when we were told the camps are often a unique child care option for the summer, so it meant a lot to be able to serve those parents.”

Miller was thrilled to have the help.

“It was very much appreciated,” he said. “We normally start planning for the camps right after Halloween. The extra help was awesome.”

“The Nonprofit Leadership Alliance has been on the UNI campus for more than 35 years,” said Kristina Kofoot, adviser and director of the local organization. UNI is a member campus of the national organization.

“The alliance helps prepare individuals for a successful career in the nonprofit sector,” she said.

Students in the alliance are divided into project categories based on their interests. They learn about the organizations they will be working with, perform the service projects and, at the end of the semester, have a tangible outcome to put on their resumes or discuss in job interviews, Kofoot said.

“Every year is different, and it is really student led,” she said. “I don’t say yes or no. I say, ‘If it is something you guys want to do and are excited about, let’s do it.’

“Every spring semester, the students absolutely love their service projects.”

While the Grout’s weeklong camps are all but sold out, openings remain for the day camps.

“Our themes this year are messy history and messy weather,” Miller said. “We encourage kids to get as messy as possible.”

Miller said the Grout began offering the day camps for families who might not be able to afford the weeklong camps.

“They have been very successful,” he said. “We have a lot of kids returning to the day camps this year and a lot of new ones, too. ... They can expect exploding slime, food fights and all sorts of other activities. We’ve even had some of the parents say they would be interested, so next year we’re offering a messy camp for adults.”

Day camps include:

- June 17 and 19: Messy Science at the Imaginarium, 322 Washington St., for ages 6-9 (registration deadline is June 10).
- June 19: Messy Science at the Imaginarium for ages 10-12 (registration deadline is June 12).
- June 24: Brainiacs Brainstorming at the Grout Museum, 503 South St. for ages 6-9 (registration deadline is June 17).
- June 26: Brainiacs Brainstorming at the Grout Museum for ages 10-12 (registration deadline is June 19).

- July 15: Messy History at the Imaginarium for ages 6-9 (registration deadline is July 8).
- July 17: Messy History at the Imaginarium for ages 10-12 (registration deadline in July 10).
- July 22: Weathering the Storm at the Imaginarium for ages 6-9 (registration deadline is July 15 and 17).
- July 24: Weathering the Storm at the Imaginarium for ages 10-12 (registration deadline is July 17).

All camps are from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. and cost \$30 for members and \$45 for nonmembers. Extended care is available one hour before and after camp for an additional fee.

For more information, go to **groutmuseumdistrict.org** or call (319) 234-6357.



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