

Academy launches Junior Ranger program

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By Michael Haritt on June 29, 2022

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Thursday, June 9, The Grosse Pointe Academy held a special event for its seventh-grade students, bringing in the MotorCities National Heritage Area Partnership for a presentation about the new Junior Ranger program the organization is launching.

The program encourages students to explore sites that relate to the Detroit region's rich automotive and labor heritage. A local MotorCities National Heritage map is provided to offer students and their families places to go.

Brian Yopp, director of programs and operations for MotorCities, opened the event by explaining his organization's overarching goal of preserving, interpreting and promoting the region's automotive and labor heritage. He further described how the Junior Ranger program, by encouraging students to explore their community with their families, helps accomplish this goal while enriching students' understanding of local history.

He later walked students through the process of registering for the program and offered guidance on how to best choose the four activities or sites they wanted to explore in order to earn the Junior Ranger badge.

While the program was presented as an extracurricular pursuit in which students can participate, facets of it are being incorporated into the students' seventh-grade summer project, according to Trevor Clor, one of the Academy's middle school teachers.

Clor said his department was inspired to further integrate the program into students' coursework because of how well it complements the eighth-grade history curriculum.

"In eighth grade, we study American history," Clor said. "When we read stories about things that happened in our past and we associate these events with a location, often the locations have become part of the National Park Service. And (the local MotorCities National Heritage map) is our closest national park site."

The partnership with MotorCities builds on the academy's legacy of taking students on National Park Service-related trips, as well as on its Montessori educational philosophy.

Clor said while middle school curriculum is not strictly Montessori-based like the early school, the freedom of choice stressed by a Montessori program of studies still is present at the middle school level. This is why the Academy strives to make broad opportunities involving student choice — like the Junior Ranger program — available to students.

"Once we get to the middle school (level), we're not officially Montessori. (However), we still strive to teach to each child's strengths," Clor said. "So I think what we do in middle school is have a broad program so that students can find their niche. And I think (the MotorCities' Junior Ranger program) is one of the options that allows us to do that."

Following the presentation, students were given the opportunity to ask questions about earning the Junior Ranger badge. Clor said more information about the students' summer project also would be presented to them.