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Summer is fun, educational at Bristow Montessori

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Observer staff

Bristow Montessori School opened its doors in September 2010 for the school year. However, unlike schools that break over the summer, it has kept its doors open over the summer for fun, educational camps for children.

Bristow Montessori is open for care for infants of 6 weeks through third grade. Sameer Patel, one of the owners of Bristow Montessori, said the school allows children to engage in self-propelled learning; however, the instructors try to straddle the line to give residents of the community an upscale daycare as well.

Children who attend over the summer were given passports to tour around the world through the school's camp offerings. The campers visited a different continent every week, including North America, Europe, East Asia, Australia, South America and Africa; they also had a passport for India.

During a week in July, the students studied Europe. When studying France, children painted like Monet, made crepes, learned about architecture, listened to music and learned about famous people.

Anita Ercole, lead teacher in the primary classroom, raves about the children's work. She said she and other teachers coordinated the study of France with Bastille Day. She boasted that she is "very proud" of the students. The students learned numbers, colors and other words in French. The youngsters made replicas of impressionist art, and the

young students even replicated Pascal's Triangle. The students rise to the challenges.

While the students learned about countries, they also had fun on the school's enclosed playground, harvested vegetables from the garden they had planted and participated in water fun to keep them cool.

Ercole has taught in the Montessori method for 11 years. With Italian parents, she was brought up in the United Kingdom. She said Montessori is a way of life. The Montessori method is certainly gaining popularity in the Northern Virginia area. Now, living in Gainesville, Ercole said she is "happy to be a part of" Bristow Montessori School.

Ercole and Sameer Patel, co-owner of the school, agree that the method is a great way to educate children who can follow their own curiosity, interests and need to know in order to educate them in all subject areas. The children lead the way in their own education, thus making them take ownership of their education since they are not "spoon-fed" information. Ercole and Patel believe the Montessori method builds self-confidence in children and makes them life-long learners.

Self-confidence certainly abounds during summer camp as students wave and introduce themselves while people tour and visit classrooms. They show their work, are very proud of their accomplishments and are happy to talk about what they like about the school.

Berhanu Dantzler, 6, attends the school all year. In fact, the young boy only came to this country from his native Ethiopia a year ago. Dantzler speaks English with ease. He has learned to read and will happily spell words for people. He even helps his classmates if they struggle. He said he enjoys playing in the sprinklers outside and riding scooters.

Ava Paarfus, 4, also attends the school all year. Her favorite activity is "learning about animals."

Vishal Suresh, also 4, said he was looking forward to his "nap tomorrow."

Melissa Schmelzer of Bristow enrolled her children Tyler, 5, and Jack, 4, in the school last year, and they attend the summer camp. She was excited about the convenient location. She said the school lends itself to her children's curiosity and challenges them in a safe environment. She said she wished the school had opened three years ago so that her oldest could have spent his whole preschool time there.

Her children also participate in the additional enrichment programs that include physical education and art classes. Schmelzer has high expectations of the school and has been pleased to see the team at Bristow Montessori exceed her hopes. Her 5-year-old, she boasted, reads and spells better than many elementary-aged students.

Paula Flanagan drives her son Micah Brown, 6, 27 miles from their home in Fauquier County so that he can attend camps and school



Micah Brown with mom, Paula Flanagan, shows an art project at Bristow Montessori School.

Terri L. Erwin-Fitz / the Bull Run Observer

in Bristow. She was lucky enough to find the school online, and she really likes the school. Micah, she said, is engaged in his education and has certainly "learned a lot" in the past year.

Summer camps operate through Aug. 26. Fall registration is underway for the school year. Students are broken into age groups: Seeds for ages 6 weeks through 16 months; Seeds 2, 16 through 24 months; Seedlings, 2 to 3 years old; Sprouts, 3 to 6 years old; and primary grades.

Bristow Montessori offers half-day and full-day programs as

wells as before- and afterschool care. More information on Bristow Montessori School, at 9050 Devlin Road, is online at www.bristowmontessori.com/ or available from Trisha Leathers, director, at 703-468-1191.

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