

Saturday 4 Kids bloom at the Oregon Garden

The nature-education program plants interest and excitement in children

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SILVERTON — Kids from all around gathered at The Oregon Garden's Children Garden for the Saturday 4 Kids program to partake in crafts and nature-related activities.

Saturday 4 Kids, a seasonal program which takes place Saturday afternoons from June through August each year, features four different environmental themes, rotating each week — birds, bugs, flowers and trees — and caters to preschoolers to sixth graders. After children complete all four Saturday 4 Kids themes (over the course of four weeks), they become Master Gardeners, and even receive gift packs from the Visitor Center.

Saturday's activities focused on flowers. Children were invited to participate in painting, coloring, stamping, making tissue-paper flowers and identifying several different flowers in The Garden.

"We try to incorporate a scientific element to the program," said Environmental Education Coordinator Fran Gray. "By identifying flowers or trees or bugs or birds, kids and parents can bring something practical home."

Gray often leads Garden tours for children and parents during these Saturdays, teaching participants to identify birds by their sound and encouraging everyone to become excited about nature.

The weekend program is gaining in popularity, she explained, beginning this season with



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Hailey Zook, 4, of Carlton takes advantage of the watercolor sets to paint her interpretation of The Garden.

approximately 10 participants to an average of 25. Some Saturdays even see up to 75 people at the Children's Garden throughout the day.

"My favorite part about working the Saturday 4 Kids is watching kids learn and be excited about nature," Gray said. "That means everything to me, and it makes me feel great."

And because of the number of families coming to at the events, Gray and other volunteers are able to give kids individualized nature lessons to accommodate to their personal learning and artistic skills.

"This is a time for kids to use their imagination and really connect parents and kids," Gray said. "We want to help families understand this environment — the basic facts — and take it to the kids' level."

Saturday was definitely testament to the objective, as several kids took advantage of the arts-and-crafts and educational activities The Garden provided.

"This one's my favorite," said Jenny Tzou, 7, of Taiwan as she perfectly cut out a pink tissue-paper flower petal. "I like crafts."

Her brother Jeffrey, 5, though, passed most of his time becoming gleefully sticky with bud-shaped bubble wands.

Kimmi Sallee, 6, of Stayton also enjoyed herself at the watercolor station. With her white paper "canvas" meticulously splattered with paint of all bright colors, she proudly showed off her creation to her guardian of the day, Susan Willson of Stayton.

Volunteer of five years Barb Lowry said that with the various Children's Garden sponsorships and donations, the Saturday 4 Kids program has grown to become a worthwhile cause.

"Last year was very good," Lowry said of Gray's incorporation of a family-oriented educational program for the Saturday 4 Kids. "The year before, we just had boxes of crafts with instructions for parents. Now we get to spend time with kids. It's fun meeting people from all over."

"I'm very proud to be part of this program," Gray said. "It just feels so good to know that you're helping these kids learn that everything is so connected."