

July 3, 1997

Winnipeg Free Press, Thursday, July 3, 1997

Local

Camp's 'programs' attract young fans

Summer computer students learn to design software

By Leah Janzen
For the Free Press

LIKE MANY kids, 12-year-old Adam Tsouras is going to camp this summer, but he won't be tying knots or learning about archery.

His days will be full of stuff like megabytes, microchips and mainframes, not sing-songs, campfires and ghost stories.

Tsouras and about 30 other kids will be attending Computers for Kids, a one-week, half-day camp dedicated to teaching youngsters the intricacies of computer programming.

"I had the choice between tennis camp and this," he said. "I picked computers without a question."

Once the domain of only brainiac math whizzes, computer programming has now become a skill even youngest of kids can learn.

"This year we'll be teaching kids as young as Grade 3," said Elliott Bay, director of the program, which has run for four years. "Six years ago we wouldn't have been able to teach this stuff to kids that young, but the technology has changed so much."

First-time camper Kaitlyn Lawes, 8, will be taught to program her own version of the Pac-Man computer game, but she knows computers can be more than just fun.

"I want to come so I can be involved in computers for a job when I'm older," she said.

Bay began Computers for Kids when he noticed computer classes for kids focused on teaching them to use existing software.

"Most schools don't even offer computer programming until Grade 10," he said. "I think that's tragically too late to start."

In fact, Kevin Lawes, an 11-year-old veteran of Computers for Kids,

said his teacher often consults him when there is a computer problem at school.

This year he will learn how to design and program his own version of the Super Mario Brothers computer game.

The skills the campers acquire are impressive, according to Greg Garychuk, a Winnipeg computer programmer.

"If they can use the technology to make games, that's amazing," he said. "Most people don't learn that stuff till university."

Bob Goodwin, owner of Ring Computer Training, said kids have the brains to learn programming, but a lack of exposure holds them back.

"I think it should be dealt with like music lessons," he said. "The schools can't afford to provide a piano for each kid, so if parents want their kids to learn, they have to access private training."



PHIL HOSSACK/WINNIPEG FREE

Clockwise from top left, Adam Tsouras, Kevin Lawes, program director Elliott Bay, instructor Dawn Nedohin, Kaitlyn Lawes

Net cheats

DUFRESNE

DO NOT PAY FOR ONE FULLY