

Heart of a Tiger: Sternberg Museum's record summer camp enrollment marks a new era of science exploration

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HAYS, Kan. – This summer, the Sternberg Museum of Natural History celebrates a milestone that speaks volumes about the human thirst for knowledge, experience, and community in a rapidly evolving world, with a record enrollment of 127 summer campers across all age groups from 35 different states, as well as India and China. This beacon of discovery amplifies its motto, "Excitement in Education through Exploration," as it opens new doors and trails for learning the earth and life sciences.

The array of summer programs lined up for 2024 are rich with educational diversity, with activities spanning across Kansas to the coast of North Carolina, to the San Francisco Bay! Sternberg's new collaboration with Eastern Tennessee State University and its Gray Fossil Site Museum exemplifies the power of collective wisdom and collaboration in enhancing learning experiences.

Perhaps the most remarkable chapters of this story unfold within the high school programs, where 80 young scientists are nurturing their calling. Among them, 54 will embark on a journey at the Sternberg Museum or Fort Hays State University, immersing themselves in the multifaceted world of paleontology.

The program's success and inclusion of a record number of instructors, ranging from returning camp alumni to doctoral students from the US and UK, echoes a larger narrative. It is a tale of unwavering commitment, both to excellence in education and to the ongoing empowerment of its high school campers through post-camp support systems and opportunities that make the "Sternberg Science Camps+" a wholly unique offering in the breadth of youth summer science education programs.

The "+" symbolizes more than a mere branding strategy; it represents an enduring dedication to bolstering student outcomes long after the summer sun sets on their camping adventures. It represents the program's commitment to innovation and collaboration with external entities with shared missions in engaging youth with the wonders of the earth and life sciences. Finally, it reflects the museum's spirit of lifelong learning and its commitment to fostering a global community of inquisitive minds.

As the museum looks toward the horizon, one can see the reflections of its past success in the eager eyes of first-timers joining the programs and in the diligence of the educators preparing to guide these young explorers. Interest in the annual camps has soared, with programs like Field Paleontology: Kansas and the new Advanced Fossil Preparation camp filling up at unprecedented speed, demonstrating a burgeoning passion for the paleontological sciences. Field Paleontology: Kansas has proven so popular that a third session of the program has been created to accommodate the lengthy waitlist for sessions one and two!

This growth is a testament to the Sternberg Museum's relentless pursuit of what lies at the heart of education: the sheer joys of shared community and exploration. As campers traverse fossil field sites and free long-sequestered fossils from their rocky enclosures, they carry with them

not just the knowledge they've accumulated but also the priceless experience of scientific inquiry in action.

For educators and parents, the museum stands as a shining example of how to meld excitement with learning. It fosters an environment where children – and adults returning to the wonder of their childhood – can surrender to their curiosity, guided by the belief that to learn is to explore.

The story of the Sternberg Museum of Natural History and its record summer camp enrollment is one of the collective triumph of its students, the program staff, and the near-singular focus of the program's founder/director David Levering's pursuit of creating powerful, accessible opportunities for kids regardless of their economic status. It is a story written by every hand that digs into the earth searching for fossils, by every mind that marvels at the stories those fossils tell, and by every heart that beats faster with the thrill of discovery. As the Sternberg Museum continues to reach new heights, it holds a mirror to society's enduring fascination with the natural world. It strengthens an unspoken promise: to keep the flame of excitement in education burning bright for generations to come.

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