

Preceptors benefit by bonding

Summer academy melds minds of teens and college counselors

Eric Baumbach
Staff Reporter

More than 200 young students from the Joseph Baldwin Academy invaded Truman during the summer, and a select group of about 20 Truman students worked day and night to make sure the experience was positive.

Joseph Baldwin Academy, more commonly referred to as JBA, is a three-week-long program for advanced students in 7th, 8th and 9th grade. It allows them to spend three weeks as college freshmen at Truman, living in the dorms and taking college level classes.

Professors teach a class in their field of study and choose two or three Truman students to work as preceptors and assist them in the classroom. They also act as camp counselors — running study halls, field trips and evening activities.

“We’re looking for somebody who is really a role model of the curious, engaged student,” said Jeff Gall, the dean of JBA and professor of social science. “We’re looking for somebody to be the kids’ friend but also to make sure they follow the rules. Preceptors really are the lifeblood of JBA.”

While some students are nominated by professors to become preceptors, others have first gone to Gall first and asked him about the job.

“I’ve had many students come to me asking about being a preceptor, and I’ve put them in touch with nominating professors,” Gall said.

Last spring when Rusty Nelson, professor of fine arts, said he needed preceptors for JBA’s first session, alumnus Thomas Marrone jumped at the chance to sign up.

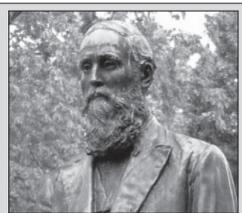
“I had heard about [JBA] before and was interested by it but was never really interested enough to do anything until the opportunity opened up in my own major, visual communications,” Marrone said.

JBA gives preceptors the opportunity to work with gifted young students who are usually eager to excel in their college level classes. For some preceptors, this opportunity was a step toward a career in education.

“Eventually I’d like to teach visual communications at the college level, and this seemed like a great opportunity to get some practice with that goal,” Marrone said.

But taking a college-level class does not transform middle school-aged kids into college students, as the preceptors discovered.

“The hardest part was keeping them quiet and orderly when they needed to be,” Marrone said. “I



Academy Attributes

Who: 7th, 8th and 9th grade students who meet the academic requirements
What: Joseph Baldwin Academy
When: 3-weeks of summer for the past 21 years
Where: Truman State University campus
Why: To challenge gifted youths with college-level classes

forgot what it was like in middle school and high school.”

For preceptors, being a disciplinarian presented a challenge.

“It was hard to see myself as the authority after being used to the other side of things,” Marrone said. “That, and trying to answer 21 different questions at once, could be really frustrating.”

Along with assisting professors in the classroom, preceptors had to run activities in the evening, like turning the basement of Baldwin Hall into a haunted house for Halloween Day.

“We would do all sorts of things,” Marrone said. “We had a big Casino Night for the kids where they played blackjack, roulette and poker to win candy.”

Faced with three weeks of 13-year-olds and 14-hour work days, the preceptors quickly bonded with each other.

“You get to know people pretty well when you work and live with them for about 12 to 14 hours a day,” Marrone said.

In addition to the long hours, preceptors often did not see very much of their non-preceptor friends, making JBA a very isolated environment.

“We joked about JBA being its own private universe,” Marrone said. “And nobody outside that universe really understands the sort of camaraderie built between preceptors. It’s 20-something of us versus 200 of them.”

In that private universe, preceptors are held responsible for the well-being of the youths.

“Basically, you’re responsible 24 hours a day,” said senior Nick Toti, a preceptor from this summer’s first session.

Despite the incredible amount of work involved, most preceptors loved the job.

“The money’s crappy,” Toti said. “But it was such a rewarding experience, I would definitely do it again, should I be lucky enough for them to ask me.”



Phil Jarrett/Index

The main estate was built by Wencil Eads in the 1970s, but the family sold the property decades ago. The estate is located between Moberly and Macon on Highway 63.

Radical residences attract attention

Highway 63 is home to architectural novelties and historical buildings

Conor Nicholl
Sports Editor

Shannon Smith, resident of 4416 North Highway 63, lives with multiple frogs, deer and a rooster that’s larger than most humans.

He is the stepson of Wencil Eads, who created the famous and unique estates that nestle outside Moberly on Highway 63.

Eads Estates

The estate, passed by hundreds of Truman students and travelers on their way home, continuously draws quizzical looks and comments.

Many stop to take photographs or ask to stay the night.

“A lot of people think it is a hotel or a bed and breakfast,” Smith said. “The strangest thing I ever had was that some kid thought we were the Mafia. We sometimes have people stop by more than once a week — it just depends on weather and traffic. A lot of people stop by to take pictures.”

Smith said University students make an occasional visit.

“About a week and a half ago, a girl from Truman stopped by and got her picture taken on top of the rooster in the front lawn,” he said.

The main estate, first built in the 1970s, resides on the south side of U.S. Highway 63 and is marked by a 20-foot red entrance gate.

Smith said Wencil and Smith’s mother, Bonnie Eads, lived there until the 1980s, when they sold the property to a Hannibal businessman.

Smith and the Eads family currently lives in a smaller estate, known as Little Winchell, north of the original estate.

Smith said the animals made from wood, fiberglass and other materials, have been collected from Wencil Eads’ vast fortune from Central Missouri Paving, a trucking company, and some Phillips 66 gas stations.

Wencil and Bonnie Eads could not be reached for comment.



The newer Eads estate, Little Winchell features a wooden outdoor gazebo at the front of the home. The structure is visible from Highway 63.

Phil Jarrett/Index

“He’s made millions,” Smith said. “Mom always liked animals, especially chickens, and Wencil enjoyed carpenter work. They always liked to spend money and they go to trade shows in Atlanta, Ga., a couple times a year to [purchase things].”

Most of the work comes from the handicraft and ingenuity of Wencil Eads. Now 82, Wencil Eads continuously shakes but has a sharp mind still can carve a piece of wood.

Little Winchell, though small in stature, also has plenty of animals, statues and knick-knacks to match the main estate. A wooden gazebo sits at the end of a long driveway that complements the giant fiberglass roosters and chickens in the front lawn.

Surrounding the gazebo are green frogs, brown and white deer and green glass from Poplar Bluff, Mo., Wencil Eads’ hometown.

Most of the edifice was created from pipes and various other household items.

“He just finds a use for all sorts of junk,” Smith said. “Some of the gazebo is made from PVC pipe. He just spackled and welded together a lot of [different things.]”

One of Eads’ more ingenious designs lies at the entrance to the smaller house. Two red, hand-constructed birds, made from various household materials sit on the ground.

“One of them is made out of a sickle, two washers, a rake and spoke off a bicycle,” Smith said

with a laugh. “The other one is partly made from a military shovel. I don’t even know how his mind works. Those are pretty cool, though.”

Smith draws a sense of pride from his stepfather’s work.

“He’s had a lot of accomplishments,” Smith said. “He has sponsored a lot of sports teams and done a lot of great things for the community. He has lived a long life.”

Lakeside Towers

Another visible landmark is the Lakeside Towers in Macon, Mo. The yellow-colored building was built in 1899, when German Colonel Fredrick Wilhelm Blee created the Blee Military Academy. Today, it’s known as Lakeview Towers and houses 60 apartments.

“It’s now home to low-income residents,” said head of maintenance Gary Shull. “We don’t have any patients anymore. It’s financed by HUD and has teenagers all the way up [to senior citizens].”

Very few low-income apartment buildings look like Lakeview Towers. It’s a three-story structure that harkens back to the days when German craftsmen first built the framework.

The inside retains much of its past. The marble steps and the brass paneling on the steps have been there for three different centuries, while the main floor retains its vaulted ceilings and open atmosphere.

One has the feeling they have just entered the Breakers

or Biltmore mansion.

“The architecture is so unique,” Shull said. “It feels like it has a personality.”

The personality was very different in the early 20th century as Colonel Blee’s military academy enjoyed a nationwide reputation.

“It was said to be a splendid military academy on par with West Point,” according to the 1983 Nov. [and] Dec. issue of Missouri Life. “It had students from the United States, Mexico, Germany, Canada and England.”

In 1914, the academy became the Still-Hildreth Sanatorium, a mental institution. Like the military academy, the institution enjoyed an excellent reputation.

“Many patients responded to the excellent care,” according to a Still-Hildreth brochure. “A large number of patients were cured. ... [The place] gained a national reputation for its humane treatment of the mentally ill.”

The institution closed in 1964 and went on the National Historic Register on Oct. 11, 1979, meaning that the architecture couldn’t be changed.

It remained uninhabited for 18 years, until Oct. 13, 1982, when the Macon-Chronicle Herald proclaimed renovation.

At first, citizens had plenty of opposition to the construction, but the Lakeview Towers reopened Sept. 29, 1987, keeping, along with the Eads house, unique architecture in northeast Missouri.

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