

Pleasanton Teen Goes to Super Scholar Institute



Christopher Sund

Super-bright kids like Christopher Sund of Pleasanton go to summer school, too.

In 15-year-old Christopher's life, that has been the University of Nevada at Reno (UNR).

Gifted students at some schools take advanced placement courses earning some college credits in their own high schools. However, Christopher experienced the real thing — university instructors giving a semester's worth of lectures five days each week, for three weeks.

The academic day ran from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. At the end of the session, Christopher earned 6 college credits. That brought his total to 18 credits, because he attended the program during the previous two summers.

Christopher's studies this summer were public health biol-

ogy and nano-technology and micro-technology. "It's always difficult, because of the time constraint. These are not difficult concepts, but there is a short period of time. What's nice is that we have three-hour classes. Each day is the equivalent of about a week," said Christopher.

There is plenty of homework, but enough time to do it, and also get in some relaxation time with the other 58 or so students in the program, said Christopher.

A third-baseman on his Harker Academy team in San Jose, Christopher especially enjoyed a class excursion to a local minor league baseball game. Otherwise, students hang out at lunch or play computer games or board games.

The students come from all over the United States. Christopher met students from Wisconsin, Texas, and both coasts.

To qualify, a student must pass screening, which includes being in the top 0.1 percent of an IQ test or the SAT.

The program at UNR is called the THINK Summer Institute. It is run by the Davidson Institute for Talent Development, which was created by former educational software entrepreneurs Bob and Jan Davidson.

As Nevada residents on the east side of Lake Tahoe, the Davidsons established in Reno a year-round academy for what the institution calls "profoundly gifted" students.

There is also the Young Scholars program, which offers information about academics and careers to the students and their families.

The idea behind all of the Davidson Institute work is that youths who are super-intelligent need accelerated work, but also need to be with their peers as they come to maturity.

Christopher's mother, Cynthia, said her son likes the balanced education that he can receive at Harker Academy, a school that dates back to 1893, when its forerunner was founded by David Starr Jordan, the first president of Stanford University.

Christopher said that he likes Harker because he a challenging curriculum is available and he still can play sports and make friends. Transportation to school is not much of a problem, because his father works in Cupertino.

Christopher started in Pleasanton public schools at Valley View elementary school. However, it was evident after about four years that Christopher was such an exceptional student that the Sunds switched him to a private school in the Tri-Valley. Later, there was the switch to Harker, for an even more challenging curriculum, said Cynthia Sund.