

## Arts

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ated by Dr. Marcia Robinson, coordinator of the Arts Center, and Ellis Rice, coordinator at Reed Whipple Cultural Center.

Robinson explained the primary focus: "The original goal was simple — to make sure our youth had the opportunity to do something constructive with their time during the summer, both educational and cultural."

The students choose two major disciplines to study during the course of the program, but they are exposed to 5 disciplines — dance, music, theater, film and visual art — giving them the opportunity to try new activities.

"PVAC is a program that teaches character building through the use of the arts. We teach them discipline, self-control, responsibility, self-worthiness and more through dance, music, visual arts, using paints, drawing, audio visual and theatre," explained Dr. Rochelle Hooks, an educator at Community College of Southern Nevada who has been working with the camp for the past two summers and assists the renowned Walter Mason who

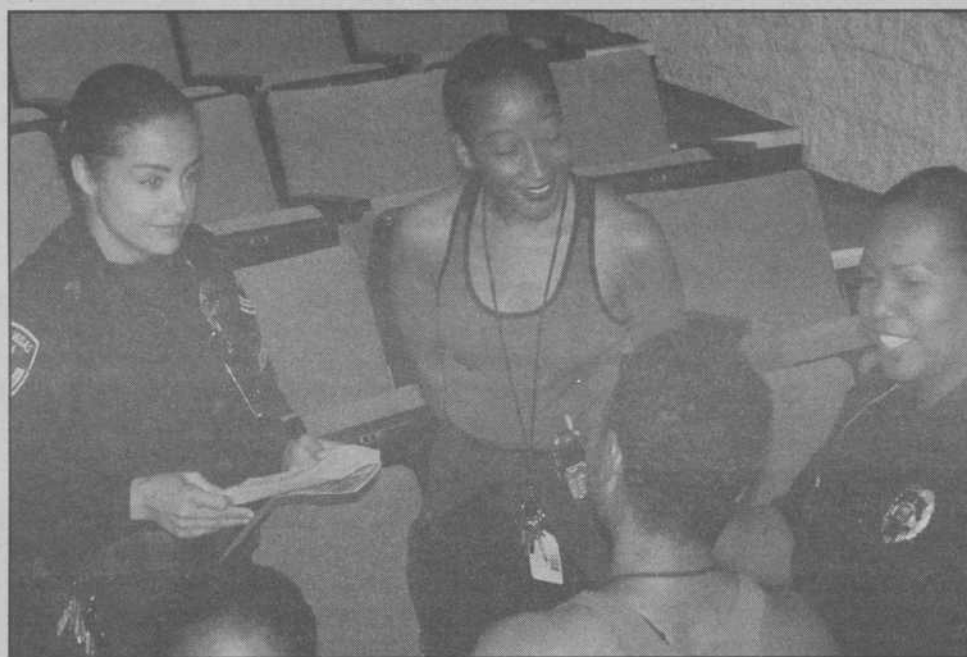
serves as theater director for the performing arts programs at the Arts Center.

One of the major camp functions is the Unity Circle, led by sisters Jani Jeppe, the West Las Vegas Library performing arts coordinator, and Jewel Jeppe, cultural activities specialist for the West Las Vegas Arts Center.

The first thing the students do every morning and the last thing they do before leaving at the end of a day is participate in the Unity Circle assembly.

Each session is a combination of discussions and other learning activities where the students get a chance to showcase what they have learned from participating in the program. The students perform short affirmations and recite short cultural readings where they exhibit their poise, articulation, speech and performance skills. The Unity Circle is open to the students' families and the local community.

Two to three times a week, the Unity Circle also hosts a local community leader who comes in as a guest speaker. Among the past speakers are Mujahid Ramadan, State Senator



Sentinel-Voice photo by Ramon Savoy

North Las Vegas corrections officer Sgt. Heidi Campbell, left, and officer Jackie Gravatt, right, are welcomed by Performing and Visual Arts Summer Camp coordinators Jani Jeppe, center facing, and Jewel Jeppe during a presentation to students at a Unity Circle.

Steven Horsford, Las Vegas Councilman Lawrence Weekly and other successful professionals, business owners and civic notables.

Jani said they welcome community members and the "elders and mentors" to interact with the children during the camp.

During the program's early years, it served 50 children per year but now has 75 to 78 children. The program

has also expanded its goals to include teaching the students self-awareness and life skills while using the performing arts as a medium for teaching personal growth.

Las Vegas area children ages 10 to 15 are encouraged to apply to the program. The camp begins accepting applications in May for the upcoming summer, according to the directors.

"The students are from

around the metropolitan area. They come in [to the library] and fill out an application and complete an audition. Basically the audition process allows us to see how advanced they are in their talent. Initially they are recommended by their teachers and principals," said Hooks.

"There is a yearly process where the returning students must reapply. We do have some alumni that have been

with us for a while," said Hooks.

The programs have been successful in sparking an interest in the arts for many of the participants. The students are allowed to return to camp until they turn 16. Some of the alumni eventually take on leadership roles, teaching younger students.

One example is 16-year-old Artesia Fleming who plans on attending Harvard Law School and becoming a trial lawyer.

"I've participated in the program for six years, but this is my first directing year, so I'm doing everything including helping the younger kids. My original discipline was dance. I think this program will help me reach my future goals because I want to practice law as well as become a dancer. It will help me become more advanced as a dancer," explained Fleming.

The camp is actively writing grants for funding in order to expand their programs and serve more students.

If you would like to know more information about the camp or upcoming events, call the West Las Vegas Library at (702) 507-3989.

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