

Spring Break Camp Focuses on French

By Carolyn Rothman, Contributing Writer

Instead of Popsicles and ice cream, these children beg for mousse au chocolat and crepes.

They gather together to play a game of Simon Says in French, after singing "Frere Jaques [Are You Sleeping]."

It may seem this is in France, but it's actually at a camp just outside Gainesville.

Judy Charudattan offered a Spring Break camp last week to help children learn French by incorporating French foods, cooking, songs, games and videos into the day.

"I'm trying to blend fun with French, which makes them want to continue it in the long run," Charudattan said.

Open to children ages 3 to 14, the program has a mix of different ages because when the older children master what is taught they help the younger ones to learn, Charudattan said, adding younger children interact with older children better than with a teacher.

Chiara Sackellares, a 7-year-old second grader who has taken French with Charudattan for a year, helps first grader Caro to say "I want to go outside" in French.

"The cooking is my favorite, and I also like saying things in French that I couldn't say before," Caro said.

Caro's mother said the camp was a great opportunity for the children and was very happy with Charudattan. Learning a language at an early age is very good for the brain and will help Caro in the future, she said.

“Caro really loved it and wanted to stay longer,” her mother said. “She’s ready to go back in the summer.”

Because the children are of different ages, the curriculum is appropriate to their level.

“I think the mixture of ages is more work for me, but I like to give all the children individual assistance and also have group activities,” Charudattan said. “They all progress at their own pace.”

The most important thing the children take from this experience is that a foreign language broadens their horizon, Charudattan said.

“It’s important for children to start learning a language under the age of 10 because they’re eager to learn,” Charudattan said. “Preschoolers don’t have to go through the translation mode. They learn the language as they see it.”

About ten children attended the camp, and Charudattan felt that was a perfect number.

“The camp went extremely well. The children had fun, learned a lot and have already said they are interested in coming back for the summer camp,” Charudattan said.

Charudattan studied French in India and started teaching in Gainesville in 1988. She started the full-day camp in 1997 and offers it during Spring Break and during certain weeks of the summer.