

*Emedia Newswire* - December 2007

## **Kids' Camp in Tuscany Provides Families With a Fun Alternative to Traditional Sightseeing**

Arte al Sole, an innovative Tuscany summer day camp, offers children a unique opportunity to experience the region on their own level.

Santa Barbara, CA (PRWEB) December 29, 2007 -- Arte al Sole director Shannon Venable is expanding the possibilities for family travel to Europe through an American-style day camp in Tuscany designed to provide international children traveling or staying in the region an opportunity to discover the art, culture, and natural wonders of the area.

The program offers week-long sessions during mid July in an idyllic setting near Lucca, a popular family destination in Tuscany due to its proximity to the coast, as well as key nearby destinations such as Florence, Barga, Cinque Terre, the island of Elba, Siena, Pisa, the natural parks of the Garfagna and Maremma, and the beaches of the Tuscan Riviera, to name only a few.

"Day camps" as we know them in the United States are not common in Italy. Working in the field of Italian history and academic publishing, Venable has heard travel reports from families who visited Tuscany in the summer and found that for their school-aged children, these extended stays often left them not quite sure what to do with themselves. Kids largely want to be with peers and miss spending time with friends. At the same time, parents may long for some grown-up time. Venable's inspiration in developing the program was the idea of providing a way for international children in Tuscany to interact with other children while experiencing the region's wonderful history and culture at their own level, in a hands on, experiential manner -- and making new friends along the way.

Last summer's participants, ranging from age 6 to 15, exceeded Venable's every expectation: "They all engaged so much with the projects in their own unique way. From Puccini, to Pinocchio, to Leonardo da Vinci, the region boasts many creative geniuses with whom to inspire the children. Physically being in the same places of such legends really fascinated them." Mornings found campers walking the property to decide the best vantage point from which to sketch the Tuscan landscape on the grounds of a 1000-year-old farmhouse cultivated with olive groves, wine grapes, and secret gardens tucked here and there. They would then return to the loggia of the house, covered with a grapevine pergola, to work on a daily project; to name a few modern-day versions of the medieval triptych illustrating a story in three parts with a stylized background, collages with Renaissance angels, studies in perspective, modeling inventions in wood a' la Da Vinci, mosaics, landscape elements of design, making marionettes, collaborating on a puppet show, and designing the show's set. The children also made pizza and pasta from scratch and explored the edible delights growing around the grounds. Simple and fun introductions to Italian conversation and vocabulary had the children greeting the locals with a respectful "Buongiorno."

Arte al Sole campers packed up their sketchbooks each Wednesday and spent the day in Lucca, a pedestrian town on a wonderful scale for such an outing, one that boasts an incredible artistic patrimony spanning from Roman antiquity to the 19th century. Venable finds the people of Lucca remarkably friendly and supportive. As she recounts, "On our first field trip, we began at the cathedral, where the children sat and sketched their choice of a stained-glass window of St. Zita, Jacopo Tintoretto's Last Supper, or a statue by Matteo Civitali. After a few minutes the church caretaker approached me and I thought he would scold me for letting the children sit on the floor, it is a church after all. In fact he complimented the children for being so well behaved, and inquired about our group. When I explained what we were up to and mentioned that we would be back the following week, he remarked 'what smart and 'bravi' (good) children they are. I'll be sure to have the cathedral floor very clean for you next week.'"

Not one to underestimate the benefits of travel for young children, Venable cherishes the opportunity her program gives her to witness the value of participants' experiences in person. "The memories we all brought home are not only special for the worlds in time and aesthetic sensibilities that they opened up for the kids, but also in terms of the connections and international friendships we all made. At the end of the week the children had found a new use for their sketchbooks: gluing in mementos, writing each other notes, or folding in a wildflower picked from the grounds as they sat and chatted about their favorite flavor of gelato and how fun it was to get their hair wet in the fountain on top of the Renaissance-era ramparts of the infamous walled city." From a child's perspective, it really doesn't get much better than that.