

Several school-aged children from Montecito could be found this past summer enjoying the camp of a lifetime: in Italy, under the Tuscan sun.

Arte al Sole is a day camp for international children offering week-long sessions based on the art, culture, and natural science of Tuscany. Shannon Venable is a Montecito resident and Program Director of Arte al Sole. “This summer’s participants exceeded my every expectation,” she said. “Ranging from age six to fifteen years of age,” she continued, “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.”

The typical day on the Arte al Sole outing sounded as if it were written for a romantic novel. “Mornings found us walking the property to decide the best vantage point to sketch the Tuscan landscape on the grounds of a thousand-year-old farmhouse cultivated with olive groves, wine grapes, and secret gardens tucked here and there. We would then return to the loggia of the house, covered with a grapevine pergola, to work on a daily project; for example, modern-day versions of the medieval triptych that told a story in three parts with a stylized background, collages with Renaissance angels, studies in perspective, modeling inventions in wood à la Da Vinci, mosaics, landscape elements of design, and creating their own puppets and scripting puppet shows in groups that were performed on the last day,” Shannon explained.

Although art was the central focus of the camp, it was not the only thing the children explored. “The children also made pizza and pasta from scratch and explored the edible delights growing around the grounds.”

Shannon said the memories brought home were not only special for the art that was created and the international awareness that the kids received, but the friendships that were made. “At the end of the week the children had found a new use for their sketchbooks, gluing in mementoes, writing each other notes, 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 walls of the infamous ‘walled city.’ It really doesn’t get much better than that.”