

Digging Summer Camp: Elementary, middle-school students explore Laurel History at Archaeological Dig by Katie V. Jones. Baltimore Sun Media August 3, 2021



Laurel Historical Society welcomed campers to its archaeology camp this week. Youth from Howard, Prince George's and Montgomery counties will be digging for artifacts at the site of two historic homes scheduled to be torn down in Laurel. On the first day of the camp, kids were mapping out the area where they will dig. The camp started at Laurel Historical Society and proceeded to the properties near St. Vincent Pallotti High School. (Jeffrey F. Bill/Baltimore Sun Media)

On Tuesday morning, 10 kids gathered at the Laurel Museum for a lesson on artifacts before heading to their main event: an archaeological dig.

All participants of Laurel Historical Society's weeklong summer archaeology camp, the group of fifth to seventh graders from Howard, Prince George's and Montgomery counties first met Monday for a virtual introduction and archaeology lesson by Ann Bennett, executive director of the society.

Since becoming executive director in March 2018, Bennett has led an archaeology summer camp in addition to the society's other summer camps in history and science. With a background in archaeology, Bennett takes the campers through the steps a real archaeologist would take when

approaching a dig site, from selecting and setting up sites to actually digging. For past camps, she has led digs around the historic Laurel Museum building.

This year, she was excited to host an archaeological dig at a new site with two historical buildings — one a single-family house, the other a duplex — on 9th Street that are scheduled to be demolished by the properties' owner, St. Vincent Pallotti High School, to create room for a new athletic facility.

“It worked out really well,” Bennett said. “I met with the principal. We walked around and ... [then] we have a new dig site.”

According to her research, the houses date to the 1890s. She said she likes the fact that the buildings are just regular homes and not associated with anyone prominent or famous in Laurel history.

“We might find domestic trash,” Bennett said. “Evidence of the people who lived there the last 100 years or so. Broken bottles, ceramics, evidence of children's toys. A coin would be helpful, but that's pretty rare.”

After walking to the site, Bennett had the campers scout the backyards of the properties for possible artifacts, as rain, snow and animals can often bring artifacts to the surface. Told not to pick up anything as that “would take away information,” campers were given flags to place near the items.

“I found trash,” said Kennedy Andrew, 10, of Columbia.

North Laurel resident Megan Castonguay, 12, who also only found trash, said, “It is kind of cool to find things that can tell a story.”

One of the buildings, Bennett said, was recently used by Pallotti's football team, and perhaps its lacrosse team, too, as lacrosse balls were everywhere.

“Maybe we'll find pieces of cones, like soccer cones,” said Colin Macomber, 10, of Columbia.



Laurel Historical Society Executive Director Ann Bennett, left, and campers begin measuring and mapping their dig site at Laurel Historical Society's weeklong summer archaeology camp on Tuesday. (Jeffrey F. Bill/Baltimore Sun Media)

Three dig sites were selected from looking at the flags' locations, dips in the ground and knowledge about what could possibly be in the backyards.

"Outhouses were probably somewhere in the back and probably a trash dump," Bennett said, suggesting both would be located near the property line. Campers were then taught how to correctly measure and mark the sites using tools an archaeologist would use.

"It is a new and interesting experience for me. Everything has been fun," Kennedy said. "Tomorrow, we start digging. That will be real fun."

Bennett will write a short report for Pallotti about the dig to document what she and the campers found on the properties prior to the buildings' demolition.

"Just the process of the whole thing is very interesting," said Amy Dunham, a Laurel Historical Society board member who has helped with the archaeology camp every year. "I have learned a lot about archaeology. It has been really neat watching what the kids pick up and learn."

Many of the campers at this year's camp attended past camps, Bennett said, so it is especially exciting to offer a new site.

"It is fun and reassuring to get repeat campers," Bennett said. "They found it enjoyable in the past and wanted to come back. This is the real deal. A real archaeology site."