

FREE

Things to Do with Kids



The Kearsarge area offers several events to help you enjoy summer with the kids — inexpensively.

BY Laura Jean Whitcomb

Summer vacation. Those two words are pure joy to children — and slightly scary for parents. There are approximately 71 days to entertain the kids and a limited budget to do so. But luckily Kearsarge area parents live in a great place with plenty of no-cost (and low-cost) activities to enjoy. I tried out as many as I could last year with my kids, then ages 6 and 8. They had a great time, I looked like a hero, and I didn't break the bank. Even if you don't have time off with the kids (like I do), you'll be able to fit in a few of these events on evenings and weekends.

FREE FOOD: *Customer Appreciation Days*

It's nice to hear "thank you." It's even nicer to hear it while being handed a hot dog. Sugar River Bank, based in Newport, has been officially thanking customers like this since 2005.

"The bank has been doing Customer Appreciation Days for many, many years," says Brandy Waterman, business banker at Sugar River Bank. "However, over the last five years they have become more advanced with decorations, giveaways and food. We

**Grill master
Gayle Fleming**



have at least one big appreciation day a year, and a few smaller ones, like handing out ice cream to our customers, scattered throughout the year.”

Last July, a luau was held at each of their branches (Newport, New London, Sunapee, Grantham and

Warner). Decorations and giveaways — like Frisbees and leis — made it fun for the kids; hot dogs, chips and soda and the prospect of winning a raffle made it fun for the adults. It’s free to bank clients and, if the kids are well behaved, it is an hour of free food and entertainment. Take the time to meet the folks behind the drive-through window — yes, they do have legs — and have the kids open a savings account so they can start learning about money.



**FREE EDUCATION:
Car Nutz Car Club Cruise**

It’s Monday evening, and you’re just not ready to start the bedtime routine. Take a stroll amid vintage vehicles at the Car Nutz Car Club Cruise in Newport. From 6 to 8 p.m., folks from all over the area bring their antique cars and trucks to the Sugar River Bank parking lot. “Some will raise the hood so you can see the engine. Some will roll down windows so you can peek inside,” says Mary Heath, car club secretary.

Any club member will answer questions — they are extremely knowledgeable and love to talk about their cars. If you have a few dollars in your pocket, treat the family to food at the Sunapee Lions Club booth or an ice cream at the Lil’ Red Baron ice cream stand. The Car Nutz season runs from May to September. >>>>



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FREE THEATRE: *Summer Performances for Kids*

Kate Niboli remembers attending performances on the side lawn of Newport's Richards Free Library when she was a little girl. "It is part of why I came back to the area," says the executive director of the Library Arts Center, host of Summer Performances for Kids. "Our mission is to bring the arts to our community and make the arts accessible to everyone."

On Thursdays in July, the Library Arts Center — in conjunction with Friends of the Richards Free Library and the New Hampshire Charitable Foundation — offers four events for families. Last summer, the Hampstead Stage Company performed "Alice in Wonderland" in a one-hour format for kids of any age. Children were mesmerized by the adventures of Alice, laughed out loud at all the crazy characters, and

some even got up on stage as part of the interactive performance. If you're looking for something to do with the kids in the morning (10:30 to 11:30 a.m.), this series is super-fun — and free.



FREE FILMS:
Movies in the Park

A cool summer evening, a place to play, food available for purchase at the snack shack, and a free movie on the big screen — the Newport Area Chamber of Commerce sure got it right when they started this outdoor family event last August. “It was a grassroots idea that started rolling,” says Laura Jacobi, president of the chamber. “We estimate that about 400 people attended ‘The Goonies.’ Given the economic times, it was a sign that this was a nice community event.”

With seven business sponsors and a borrowed movie screen from Newport Recreation Department, Movies in the Park ran for five weeks at Meadow Park. There was a nice mix of movies — from classics like “The Goonies” to new releases like “Avatar” — to appeal to a wide range of ages. Families gathered their sleeping bags, lawn chairs and flashlights; loaded up their cars; and arrived at dusk to chat with neighbors and play on the playground. Dress warmly, however, New England nights can be on the cool side. “It got a little cold in September,” says Jacobi. This year, all four movies will be held on Saturday nights in August. >>>>

Get the Dates

- Summer Reading Program:
www.newport.lib.nh.us
- LAC Summer Performances for Kids:
www.libraryartscenter.org
- Movies in the Park:
www.newportnhchamber.org
- Music in the Meadow:
www.granthamnh.net
- Car Nutz Car Club Cruise:
www.carnutznh.com
- Market on the Green:
www.marketonthegreen.com

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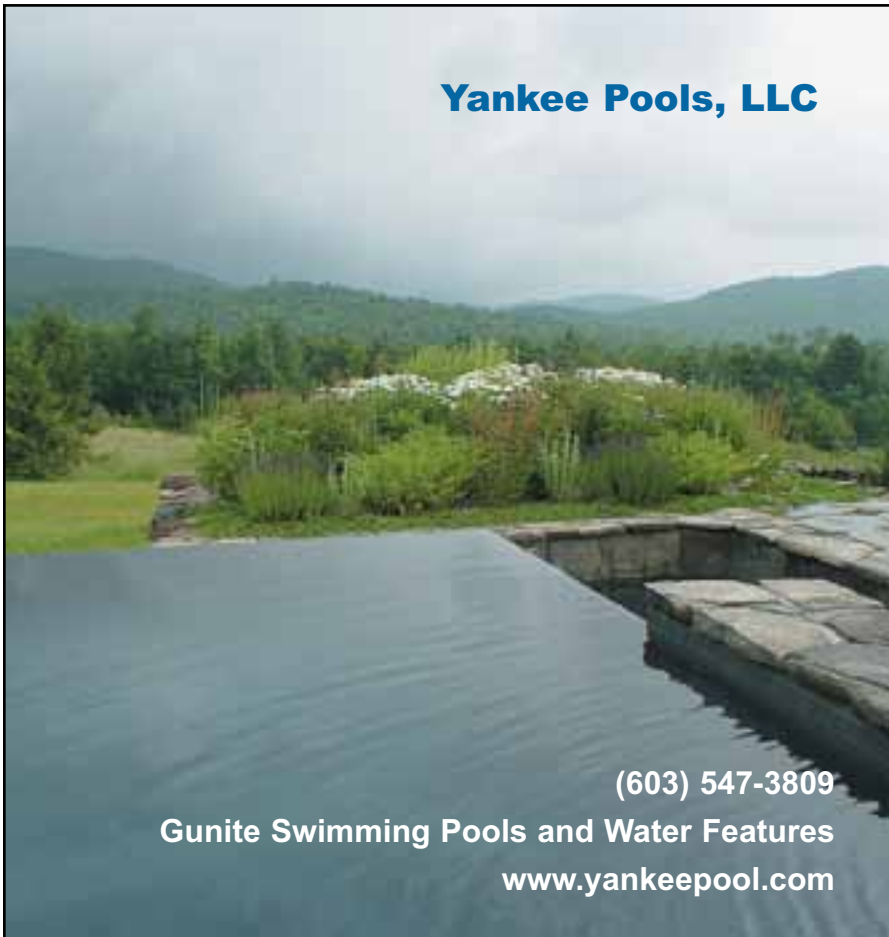
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FREE MUSIC:

Music in the Meadow

Outdoor concerts happen in almost every town, but attendance varies depending on the weather or the type of music. Last year most families made time to attend more than one of these free outdoor concerts; “Attendance was way, way up,” Laura Jacobi says of the Concerts on the Common series in Newport.

Grantham joined the list of towns offering music and entertainment to families last August, with four Tuesday evening outdoor concerts at the Grantham Recreation Park on Shedd Road. Parents and kids of all ages brought their lawn chairs and a picnic snack to the free concerts, which ranged from Jim Hollis’ one-man pop/rock act to blues group Jambalaya.

“The attendance when The Flames played was quite good, and



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it was obvious that a good time was had by all,” says John Lovejoy, a Grantham resident and musician with The Flames. “I’m looking forward to another season of concerts — hopefully The Flames will make an encore performance!”

FREE BOOKS: Summer Reading Programs

One child loves to read. One would rather not. How can you satisfy both kids? Try a summer reading program. Most local libraries have one, and we checked out the 2010

Summer Reading Program at Richards Free Library last year. The program, Make a Splash, had record-breaking participation: 150 children. “You don’t see all of them all the time, but many of them pop in occasionally,” says Janice Brehio, children’s librarian. “They read, keep track of their time. We stamp their charts and they earn tokens that they get to trade in for prizes. Books are always the best deal, of course.”

The program — which offers two to five activities a week for seven weeks — has been running for more than 20 years. As one of the >>>>

Low Cost Activities

If you missed the free events, there are still plenty of low-cost activities to try.

Bowling. On Wednesday and Sunday mornings, you can bowl a string (10 tries) for \$1.75 at the Upper Valley Lanes and Games in White River Junction, Vt. Shoe rental is optional. Five of us bowled for an hour and a half for the whopping amount of \$8.75. Learn more at www.lanesand-games.com

Touch a Truck. This August event is actually free, but because it is held in Lebanon you might need to fill your gas tank. It’s worth the trip, however, to watch the kids climb on, touch and pretend to drive some big trucks at the Touch a Truck annual event at the Carter Community Building Association (CCBA). After they’re done paving the road or putting out a fire, they can have some free refreshments: lemonade and popcorn. It’s usually held on a Saturday morning from 10 a.m. to 12 p.m. Find the date at www.joinccba.org

Meet the Farmers. Another drive on a Saturday in August, and you can almost eat a free lunch at the Producers Fair at the Co-op Food Stores in Lebanon. We sampled ice cream, yogurt, cheeses, homemade pizza, past, crackers, fruit and veggies. We met the farmers who made the food, we took a hayride around the parking lot, we got our faces painted, and we left with a recyclable tote full of goodies. Go to www.coopfoodstore.coop to get the date of this year’s fair.

activities, Shawn O'Neill of Rainforest Encounters (www.rainforestencounters.com) brought some interesting animals for the kids to meet: boa constrictors, tree frogs, turtles, tarantulas and geckos, to name a few. O'Neill would share fact about each animal species as he circled the room. Although my child opted not to get

up close and personal with the animals, it did prompt him to read about them when he got home.

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year's program, which has the theme: One World, Many Stories. Brehio is already planning some fun activities to match the theme.

FREE CRAFTS: *Market on the Green*

It's 3 p.m. You need to start thinking about dinner, but the kids are looking for something to do. Try the Market on the Green in New London. It's not a farmers' market — although there are farmers there — it's "a market for all creative types," says Annie Ballin, executive director of the Center for the Arts, the market's sponsor. "There are painters, potters, wood carvers, fiber artists and live music."

Parents can pick up a loaf of bread, fresh veggies or a mini apple pie for dinner while the kids "play, romp and explore," says Ballin. Every week, the Center for the Arts provides a free activity for kids, like face painting or creating paper plate flowers. Some of the 30-plus vendors get involved as well: one of the potters provides a demonstration and a fabric artist has a craft table where kids can make something for a few dollars. "It's a social time, a fun time, with entertainment and education," says Ballin.

The Market on the Green is held on Wednesdays, from 3 to 6 p.m., starting June 29. **K**