

What We Did Last Summer:

Digital Storytelling at Muhlenberg's **KAMP**

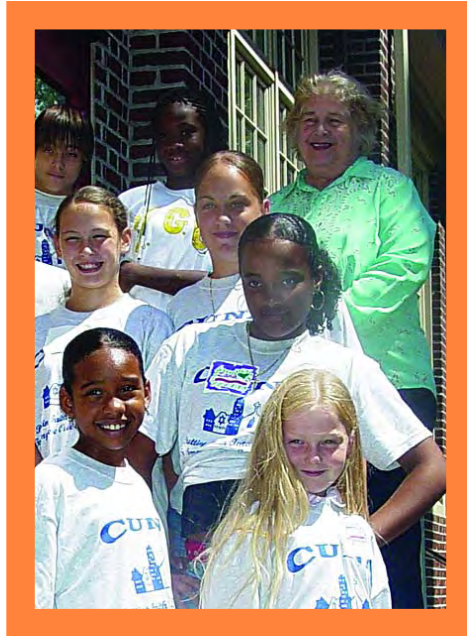


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Marlene "Linny" Oberkotter Fowler (right) with children in the KAMP program

*Marlene "Linny" Oberkotter Fowler and
the Fowler Family Charitable Gift Program
Help Young Filmmakers Document Community Life*

By Stacey Prohaska

On Friday, August 25, twelve young filmmakers gathered at the Allentown Art Museum for the premiere of their very own "Allentown Stories," a collection of short documentaries they had produced to address critical issues in their local community. The documentaries were a culmination of a two-week intensive program called KAMP (Kids Access Media Project) directed by Dr. Lora Taub-Pervizpour and Dr. Kate Ranieri of Muhlenberg's media and communication department.

In attendance were Marlene "Linny" Oberkotter Fowler and Beall Fowler, whose Fowler Family Charitable Gift Program provided the lead gift to fund the KAMP initiative and help the young filmmakers achieve their vision. Fowler is an artist, arts patron and philanthropist whose passion is advancing education among children and youth.

The idea for KAMP stemmed from an earlier collaboration between Muhlenberg College and CUNA (Congregations United for Neighborhood Action) and grew from a Documentary Research course that Taub-Pervizpour and Ranieri teach each semester. In the course, Muhlenberg students create digital stories that document some aspect of their social world. This summer, Taub-Pervizpour and Ranieri took 12 young volunteers from CUNA, ages 10 through 17, through the same process with KAMP.

"First we talked about the issues that were most important to the kids," says Ranieri. "For instance, one of the KAMPers was concerned about the community's litter problem; another was focused on traffic and safety in areas where children are playing outdoors."

Once the KAMPers had chosen an idea, the next step was to decide how best to tell the story visually. For 10 days they traveled the 20-block distance along Chew Street between Salem U.C.C. and Muhlenberg College engaged in documentary research. "The kids hit the streets with disposable cameras to take pictures that would help them conceptualize their films," says Ranieri.

"There is nothing more exciting than to empower children to contribute in making their neighborhoods and communities healthy places to live and learn."

—"Linny" Fowler

From there, KAMPers developed a script and worked with iMovie software in Walson Hall to put their photos together in a cohesive way; add music, a voice-over narrative and graphics; and edit their work into a short film. Junior Amy Chrzanowski, a media and communication/theatre major at Muhlenberg, served as mentor, research and tech assistant and helped KAMPers get to know each other and the digital equipment through creative games and exercises.

The Allentown Art Museum provided the perfect space for the premiere of "Allentown Stories," and KAMPers were excited to showcase their work. The evening's events opened with remarks by President Helm followed by introductions of the young documentarians and the premier of their films.

"The films revealed the exuberance that KAMPers brought to their work and each other every single day," says Ranieri. "Allentown Stories' crystallized the voices and visions of a group of engaged and creative young people. The stories also rendered powerfully the value and meaning of community in the children's lives."

Ranieri and Taub-Pervizpour plan to continue KAMP next summer and have plans to add programming during the academic year as well.

"There is nothing more exciting than to empower children to contribute in making their neighborhoods and communities healthy

places to live and learn," says Fowler. "Children can make a difference."

Fowler has served and supported countless organizations in the Lehigh Valley and beyond including Head Start, ArtsQuest, the Allentown Art Museum, the Baum School of Art, the Banana Factory (where she is an artist-in-residence), CEOAMERICA of the Lehigh Valley, Community Services for Children, Valley Youth House and Lehigh Valley Child Care, among others. She has won numerous awards for her service to the community, most recently the 2006 Governor's Award. Each year, this prestigious award is bestowed upon one person in the Commonwealth who makes "significant contributions to the vitality and availability of the arts in Pennsylvania."

"Projects such as KAMP help kids become aware of their similarities despite their differences," says Fowler. "Through their eyes we can see that our greatest strength is our diversity. The key is to work together and value our differences." Additional funds and support for KAMP were provided by Air Products and Chemicals, Inc., FLSmidth, Inc., Dan's Camera City and Dorney Park & Wildwater Kingdom.

For more information on corporate, foundation and government giving, contact Deb Kipp at 484-664-3223 or kipp@muhlenberg.edu. ■



photo credit: Deb Kipp

Fowler (R) and Kate Ranieri of the Media and Communication department with a KAMPer

DIGITAL STORIES AND FILMMAKERS

❖ Caution! Children at Play

Joey Zver and Tony Prentice
Issue: Traffic and Safety for Community Youth Playing Outdoors

❖ Young Girlz United

Hydrea Hankerson, Laquanda Thomas and Iesha Pridgen
Issue: Step Dancing as Recreation, Exercise, Friendship and Pride

❖ The Good, the Bad, and the Difference

Bobbi Ann Gabriel and Kirstin O'Hare
Issue: Graffiti at Community Parks

❖ Skool

Christian Roman
Issue: The Best and Worst Parts of School

❖ Expense

Zana Zver
Issue: Cheerleading's High Cost of Membership

❖ Litter

Joan O'Hare and Ashley Marie Roman
Issue: Efforts to Keep Allentown Litter-Free

❖ Youth Recreation

Louise Zver, KAMP Coordinator
Issue: Advocating for Community Youth Recreation Sites