

WHEN SCHOOL'S OUT, THE BOYS & GIRLS CLUB IS IN

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Parents looking for a fun and safe place to take their children over the Christmas/winter break can still take advantage of the Christmas break program at the Boys & Girls Club of Ottawa County.

The program is available through Dec. 30 from 7:45 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. at the Riverview Park and Teen Center (the former Will Rogers Middle School) sites.

"The club understands parents need to work and have a safe place for their kids to go over breaks," said Executive Director Mackenzie Garst. "Kids no longer need to sit at home



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Garst has been the executive director for the Boys & Girls Club of Ottawa County for five years, but she's been part of the club for 15 years. After graduating with a degree in psychology from Pittsburg State University in 2009, she joined the U.S. Peace Corps and served three years in Grenada as a youth development volunteer. She then returned to work at the Joplin Boys & Girls Club for three years before the job at the Ottawa County club became available.

"I love working in Ottawa County and partnering with the schools, tribes and local businesses to serve kids," Garst said.

She anticipates serving



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over 100 kids throughout the Christmas break, but they can accommodate up to 300. Kids don't have to be enrolled members of the Boys & Girls Club After School Program to attend any of the break programs the club offers.

"They simple need to enroll and pay the fee to participate," Garst said. "Kids can attend as little or as much as they would like to for one flat fee."

Meals and snacks are provided each day during the Christmas break program. Breakfast usually consists of cereal and muffins and lunch is sandwiches and chips. Snacks vary but may include trail mix, cheese sticks, chips, crackers, etc.

The kids also have a variety of activities and games they can do with other kids in their age group. The Riverview Park location is open to kids in kindergarten through third grade and the Teen Center is open to those in fourth through 12th grades.

"Kids are grouped by the ages and rotate through the various program spaces, which include STEM, Art, Physical Activity and Computers," explained Garst. "Kids spend around 45 minutes per room and each rotation has a different scheduled activity."

On a typical day, kids have breakfast then choose which program room they want to participate in. They have lunch as a group and the afternoon consists of rotations into individual program rooms with activities.

"Kids may be working on a STEM building challenge, then rotating to an art

project, then into the computer lab to play games, then into the gym for a group game," Garst said.

The kids who attended Winter Break at the Club on Dec. 22 participated in a special Christmas program.

"We hosted our annual Christmas luncheon on Wednesday for all youth enrolled in our break program," said Garst. "(They) received a hot lunch, presents to open and fun crafts/activities. All presents were donated by the Stables Casino toy drive."

The Christmas/winter break isn't the only time the Boys & Girls Club opens its doors to local kids when they're out of school. The club is also open to any school-age children during fall break, spring break and summer break.

After the last day of Christmas break programming won't be available on Friday, Dec. 31 or Monday, Jan. 3.

The Boys & Girls Club After School program will resume on Tuesday, Jan. 4, including at its new site at the Wilson Early Childhood Center. After-school programs run from 3:15 to 5:30 p.m. on Mondays through Fridays.

"We are always open to any community youth who wants a fun and safe place to be a kid," Garst said.

For more information about the Boys & Girls Club After School Program or to enroll, call the Riverview Park location at 918-542-6325.