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Craig Peterson: Welcome back to Tech Talk with Craig Peterson. Today we're talking all about some of the things you can do with your kids, to help them to learn during the summer; and of course, throughout the rest of the year as well. We're joined now by a VP over at the National Center for Family Literacy. Her name is Emily Kirkpatrick. We're going to talk about something they've put together called Wonderopolis, which is basically Camp What-A-Wonder. We're going to talk about that, what they have online, and some of the things that people are doing with Wonderopolis at home as well. Emily, welcome to Tech Talk with Craig Peterson.

Emily Kirkpatrick: Pleased to be with you.

Craig: Well. Why don't you tell us what it is, you guys are doing over there to help kids and to really kind of get that brain stimulated?

Emily: Great! We have developed Wonderopolis, available at wonderopolis.org; and it's an exciting on and offline program that helps parents and children come together around topics filled with wonder. Questions as widely ranging from, "Why are flamingos pink," to, "Why are school buses yellow," to coming up over the summer, "Do praying mantises really pray?" The idea is to engage parents and children in learning and literacy together, around topics that provide real world interest and significance; things that we're curious about in our daily life, both as adults and children. Introduce them to new vocabulary words, and most of all, develop a lifelong passion for learning together. In today's world, with technology, it's all about learning as fast as you possibly can, and Wonderopolis helps create that lifelong curiosity.

Craig: Well, I'm on the site right now. Again, it's wonderopolis.org. You've got the Wonder of the Day that you're putting together, and it looks like it's basically a curious question. This particular one talks about 3D glasses, how does it work? And it sounds like what you are really doing here is a year-round stimulation. Is this entirely based on the Web?

Emily: It is both on and offline. We're engaging children in classrooms and families together in homes. We're hearing from them that they're pursuing amazing offline projects and activities as a result of learning about the Wonder of the Day. They're performing their own experiments,

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planning their own family field trips and projects, as a result of the inspiration of what they're learning. Our goal is to see that each and every Wonder of the Day throughout the year encourages a family to learn something new and expand on the little nuggets that we provide throughout the day.

Craig: Well. It's kind of interesting here looking at some of the things like learning; where banana bruises come from? How Jell-O keeps its jiggle? A trip in imagination and through the imagination can be better than a trip around the world. And that's all stuff that you can learn at home by just going online. You mentioned the classroom is well; how is it being used in the classroom?

Emily: We have teachers, and principals, and administrators all across the country using Wonderopolis to supplement their educational content throughout the year. Wonderopolis approaches all disciplines of education and offers opportunity for librarians and teachers alike to bring the idea of wonder into a classroom. We've had classrooms skipping each other and offering opportunities for students in Dublin, Ohio to communicate with students in Missoula, Montana on poetry as a result of Wonderopolis. So, we're finding that classrooms in school are really personalizing how they wish to use it.

Craig: I noticed that people can go and nominate wonders as well. Is that part of the classroom involvement, kids can come up with different things?

Emily: It's part of the classroom involvement, as well as for anyone listening to this show. You can go on to wonderopolis.org and submit your very own curious question, and see if they will personally review it and consider it for a possible future Wonder of the Day. So, if you go on to the website at wonderopolis.org; just look for the button, Nominate a Wonder.

Craig: Now, let's talk about what you're doing with this camp here. You've got Camp What-A-Wonder that you're launching this year, again through your website, and what's that designed for? What are you intending to do with that and what can people find with it?

Emily: Indeed. We're very excited about the Camp What-A-Wonder. We are saddened and compelled to do something about the terrible concern of summer learning loss. It's estimated that children can lose up to one full month of educational progress over the summer just because their minds may go without enough stimulus. So, to address that, we have developed Camp What-A-Wonder, which is a totally free virtual summer camp. We want to share with families the timeless passion of going to camp and combine that with a love of learning and wonder. So, we're going to be launching on June 23rd and we will be having the camp convene each and every Thursday through August 11th. And we're going to be exploring themes such as the Camp Canteen and food that you might eat at a summer camp, as well as team sports and crafts that are special to camp, all the way to the adventures, and most of us know that traditional camps have ended with a talent show. So, it's going to be a wide variety of topics for parents and children to engage in together to prevent summer loss or summer educational loss, and most of all, have fun together.

Craig: It really looks neat. When I'm looking right now with some of these questions and things, these are things I'd love to spend a little bit of time discussing with our kids. And so, with the

camp, how are you setting that up? Do you have them every day, where they have a few of these types of wonder questions that their asking themselves? Or how does it work, is there feedback?

Emily: Sure. Every single Thursday beginning June 23rd, the camp will convene and will have a wonder question related to the camp. So, I'll give you a hint. The first one has something to do with poison ivy we're all fearful of. And campers will get to learn. We'll also convene a campfire session, especially for parents, through Twitter, again it's totally free, and parents will get to ask our literacy specialists questions about helping their children throughout the summer. So, the small and large things they can do to support their children's education and develop that love for learning that we talked about so much. So, we'll be convening the campfire sessions every Thursday at 8pm, again beginning June 23rd.

Craig: It really looks interesting. I'm definitely going to get my kids involved with some of these stuffs. Now, you also have a summer reading loss program here. I see a renowned study by Harris Cooper, Professor of psychological sciences at the University of Missouri, estimates that summer loss for all students equals about one month. You mentioned that a little bit earlier here. And when I look at some of these stuffs, the question really revolves around, I guess, brain stimulation in general versus reading or sciences or math. Is that what it is? If you just keep the brain stimulated they're less likely the lose things? Or do you have to continue to review things, like the mathematics, or sciences, or other things they might have been studying during the school year?

Emily: Sure. It's really all of the above. It indeed is stimulation, continuing to read, and frankly, be curious about the things that interest us most. And that's when we find children are most interested in, in learning and pursuing topics. It all has to relate to what they're interested in and that's kind of a fundamental part of human nature. We know and I see from my 20 years of experience that parents have a vital role to play in their children's educational development. So, it's having those daily conversations, introducing each other to new words, having what we call family field trips and activities where families can learn together, that will really help stimulate the learning and prevent summer loss over the year. We also advocate parents to work with their children on some of the high points of what the child has learned throughout the school year; whether it's been fractions, or a science concept, or a particular literary character that they have met through their reading program, continuing to talk about those things and work on them over the summer. We believe that learning and education should be fun and should be an inter-generational affair.

Craig: I like the fact too that everything on wonderopolis.org, including this Camp What-A-Wonder that we've been talking about, are completely free. There's no charge there. I also see some social media tie-ins right on the home page into Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. How does that all work? You've only got about a minute left here, Emily.

Emily: Sure. Well, we would like everyone listening to this show to find us on Facebook to hear the latest information from Wonderopolis. Follow us on Twitter. You can have the Wonder of the Day delivered to your cell phone or email box completely free of charge. And that comes

complement of a very large and impressive grant from the Verizon Foundation to support Wonderopolis and its ongoing investment over three years.

Craig: It's wonderopolis.org. You'll find all kinds of information there. It's where the wonders of learning never cease. Kids are born as learning machines. And I think in some ways, we kind of beat it out of them over the years where learning is no longer any fun. Emily; thanks for being with us today.

Emily: Thank you.

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