

# Taking young minds for a spin at Georgia Highlands

*Camp gives boys time to learn, play*

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Mark Pergrem uses a spinning bike wheel to demonstrate the forces of physics during the Foundation Camp at Georgia Highlands College on Monday. Ryan Smith / RN-T

...In March, the government cut federal funding for the National Youth Sports Program, which had become a fixture at Georgia Highlands College. Three men were determined not to let the spirit of the program die.

Jon Hershey, Dave Mathis and Greg Shropshire helped organize this week's Foundation Camp, which was made possible through a partnership between Georgia Highlands and the 100 Black Men of Rome.

The NYSP was a several-week, co-ed program for low-income youths. Georgia Highlands, previously known as Floyd College, had hosted the NYSP for 33 years before its funding was cut. Though on a smaller scale than the NYSP, the Foundation Camp attempts to use sports and academics to teach young males the importance of self-respect and confidence, according to Hershey. Mathis had been the project administrator for the NYSP.

Shropshire is president of the 100 Black Men of Rome, where Hershey, a Highlands professor, had been mentoring.

The free camp runs from 9 a.m. to 2:30



Camp participants Chris McClendon, Seth Shropshire and Neal Jones get ready for a canoe ride Monday. Ryan Smith / RN-T

p.m. through Thursday of this week. Twenty-seven campers, ranging in age from 12 to 17, get the opportunity to play sports like basketball, golf and tennis in the morning.

In the afternoon, campers are participating in academic experiences, such as science labs and other hands-on enrichment exercises. The organizers have also arranged for a positive role model to speak to the campers at lunch every day.

"We want to provide a positive experience on a college campus," said Shropshire. "We want them to see that it is different from middle and high school."

Mathis added that he hopes the program will help convince potenti



Troy Varnado gets a lesson in momentum Monday as he spins on a rotating platform while holding weights. Ryan Smith / RN-T

al dropouts who have the ability to make it to stay the course. Maybe, he said, they will understand the opportunity available with a high school diploma and realize that college could and should be in their future.

Kids at the camp enjoyed the opportunity to meet new people and get out of the house.

"It gives us something to do, so we don't get into trouble," said Aubrey Williams, 17.

Williams and his brother, Daniel, 14, moved to Rome from Mississippi after Hurricane Katrina nine months ago. They both

said Monday they are looking forward to the rest of the week.  
"It's fun," said Isaac Sellers, 14. "It's better than being at home."  
"At home you just sit there and watch cartoons," said Daniel  
Williams.

The organizers hope the camp becomes an annual event and plan  
to expand it in the future.

Thank you,

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