ThursdayStyles

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The New York Times

Summer Break? I'm Working on It

By MANDY KATZ

KRISTEN BARNETT, a high school sophomore in Sherborn, Mass., hoped to multitask this summer, combining outdoor adventure and Spanish-language practice with meeting her school's community service requirement. A volunteer tour to Costa Rica run by Global Works Travel fit the bill perfectly. But the price — more than $4,500 — did not. "We're more nervous than we have been in the past" about finances, said Leslie Barnett, Kristen's mother, who owns a small business and whose husband works in software.

The solution? Kristen will cover half the fee with baby-sitting, refereeing youth soccer and cash from her grandmother, while her parents will stint on upkeep. "Our house needs to be painted, our driveway should be paved, and the cars need work," Ms. Barnett said. "We are really stretching to make this work."

Paying for camps and programs with a little teenage sweat equity.

A tight job market and recession budgeting may fall hardest on high school students who depend on summer job income. But now they pose a challenge even for affluent teenagers, as families that might once have readily paid for service-travel, precollege courses or sleep-away camps reconsider their options.

Still, even as consumers cut back on everything from taxis to Tiffany, families like the Barnetts are scraping together steep fees to keep their children challenged this summer. At a time when the overall travel industry is in a slump, operators of camps, and educational and volunteer travel programs say they are surprised at the sustained interest. As for parents, many tend to echo the programs' marketers and describe them in terms like "investment" and "value."

Programs with price tags of $1,000 to $2,000 or more a week are proving relatively recession-proof. Applications for precollege programs at

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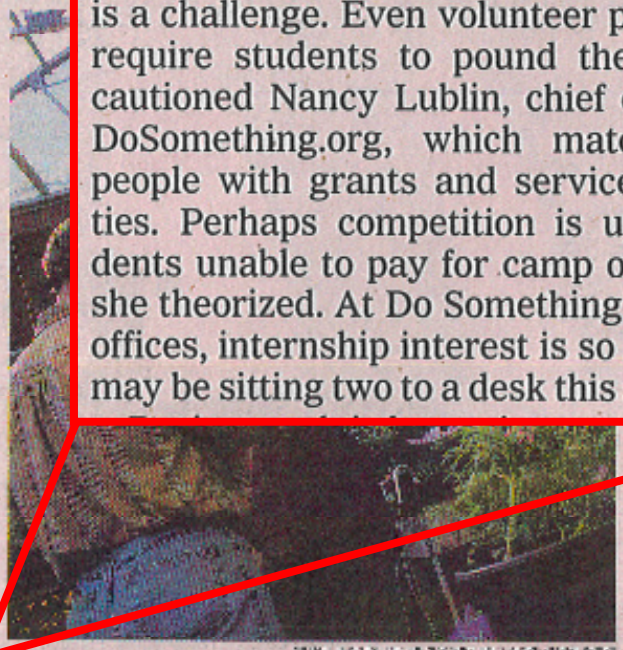
Parents are asking more questions about discounts and payment plans.

For students whose budgets exclude fee-based options, finding jobs and internships is a challenge. Even volunteer positions can require students to pound the pavement, cautioned Nancy Lublin, chief executive of DoSomething.org, which matches young people with grants and service opportunities. Perhaps competition is up from students unable to pay for camp or find work, she theorized. At Do Something's New York offices, internship interest is so strong, they may be sitting two to a desk this summer.



SEASONAL WORK The economy has forced Max Craft, above right, to go back to his summer job as a janitor, above. Below left, a Global Works community project participant during her visit to Ecuador.