

## Omi to host winter writing course for tweens

By Adam Clayton Columbia-Greene Media | Posted: Wednesday, January 1, 2014 12:30 am

GHENT - The Omi International Arts Center's education program is reaching its 10-year anniversary mark, and its latest offering is a creative writing class for ages 11 to 14 taught by professional editor, writer and Ghent resident Jennifer Wai-Lan Strodl.

Omi is known for its sculpture gardens and its programs geared toward artists, but the education department has begun providing writing classes and workshops.

Sasha Sicurella is the head of Education Omi, the center's education department. She said that the hardest age group to get programs for has been those out of adolescence but not quite teenagers, often referred to as tweens.

"Offering programming for teens and tweens has proved challenging as these transitional ages can often present social or creative hesitance," Sicurella said.

She said when Strodl, a Ghent resident, approached her with the idea for a class that was flexible enough to include 11-year-olds but also offered intellectual structure for 14-year-olds, she knew they had a perfect fit for a program.

The workshop, Story: A Creative Writing Workshop for Youth, runs for four consecutive Saturdays in January, starting Jan. 4 and finishing up Jan. 25.

The program's registration started Nov. 22 and sold out within a little over a day, Sicurella said.

Strodl said they did not have time to produce posters or send out an email before the class filled up.

"When the class filled in less than 48 hours, we had already started to plan more offerings for spring," Sicurella said.

Strodl is a graduate of Princeton University, where she studied English literature and creative writing. She has been an editor at The Sheep Meadow Press, a comic book editor at Marvel Enterprises, and is currently a staff writer for Bard College. She has lived and taught in China and San Miguel de Allende, Mexico, where she met her husband.

Sicurella met Strodl when her 5-year-old daughter, Lida, joined Omi as camper last summer. Sicurella said Strodl fell in love with the center and wanted to participate in its writing programs.

"It is connections like these that remind me how bountiful our community is — a place where you can find a Princeton grad in your own backyard, raising a family and more than eager to teach a writing class," Sicurella said.

Education Omi began in 2005 as a small summer camp for children and has expanded to incorporate year-round educational programming for the public.

Strodl has been a Columbia County resident for years. She said she feels the county is more geared toward creativity and artistry than many other places she's lived. She said she was aware of Omi before living in Ghent, but once she moved there she could really experience the center.

"I love what they do," Strodl said. "My daughter got so much out of Omi's camp program."

Her daughter was more into visual arts, but that she wanted to bring writing arts to Omi as well, which is why she approached Sicurella, she said.

Strodl said she feels teaching creative writing to younger children and tweens is advantageous because they are at the ages when they have the most imagination, and all it takes is some shaping and guidance to produce creative works.

"At some point toward the end of the program, we are going to find a way to share the kids' creative voices and works to showcase what they can accomplish," Strodl said.

Strodl said she would featured in more creative writing programs at Education Omi in the future.

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