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WITH THE KIDS

Beach camp's not your typical day of surf and sand

DON'T let the mythology fool you: Most Angelenos have never seen action on a surfboard. In fact, the average local couldn't hang 10 if you spotted him a five and four ones. This saddens avid surfer and Venice del Play co-founder Sydney Lovelace. So when new kids swing by his beach camp's winter break session on Wednesday (Venice del Play meets summers and most school vacations), he'll be inclined to set Mom or Dad straight.

"The kids have never been in a wet suit," Lovelace, the camp's water safety and athletics coach, says with tangible disbelief. "They don't know what it is. I tell the parents, 'If you're going to live in Southern California, you ought to have a wet suit in the closet.' "

How's that for investing in local resources. Lovelace may well believe that life's a beach and then you die, but don't get the impression that Venice del Play is strictly dedicated to building the next generation's Kelly Slaters. As co-founder Carmen Thomas — parents may remember her from her five years as Hillary Wilson Martin on "All My Children" — explains, the camp's location near Ocean View Drive means it automatically qualifies as a, um, beachhead for creativity.

Not to be confused with soccer camp, Venice del Play promises as much tai chi, yoga and acting as boogie boards and sand castles. As locals know, Los Angeles diversity essentially translates to cultural mash-ups, exemplified by an upcoming Venice del Play session featuring a former pro football player demonstrating gridiron basics — as the opening act for a dance instructor.

"You'll have an athlete introducing them to ballet, and it's all outside, in a grassy area underneath palm trees," says Thomas. She would be coy if she didn't also note what a friend to harried parents a day of play in ocean air can be; nothing makes a tyke surrender to bedtime quite like it. Still, it's beach camp's overt attributes that she touts most. "It's a way for kids to be outside with their friends — bonding in a whole different way."

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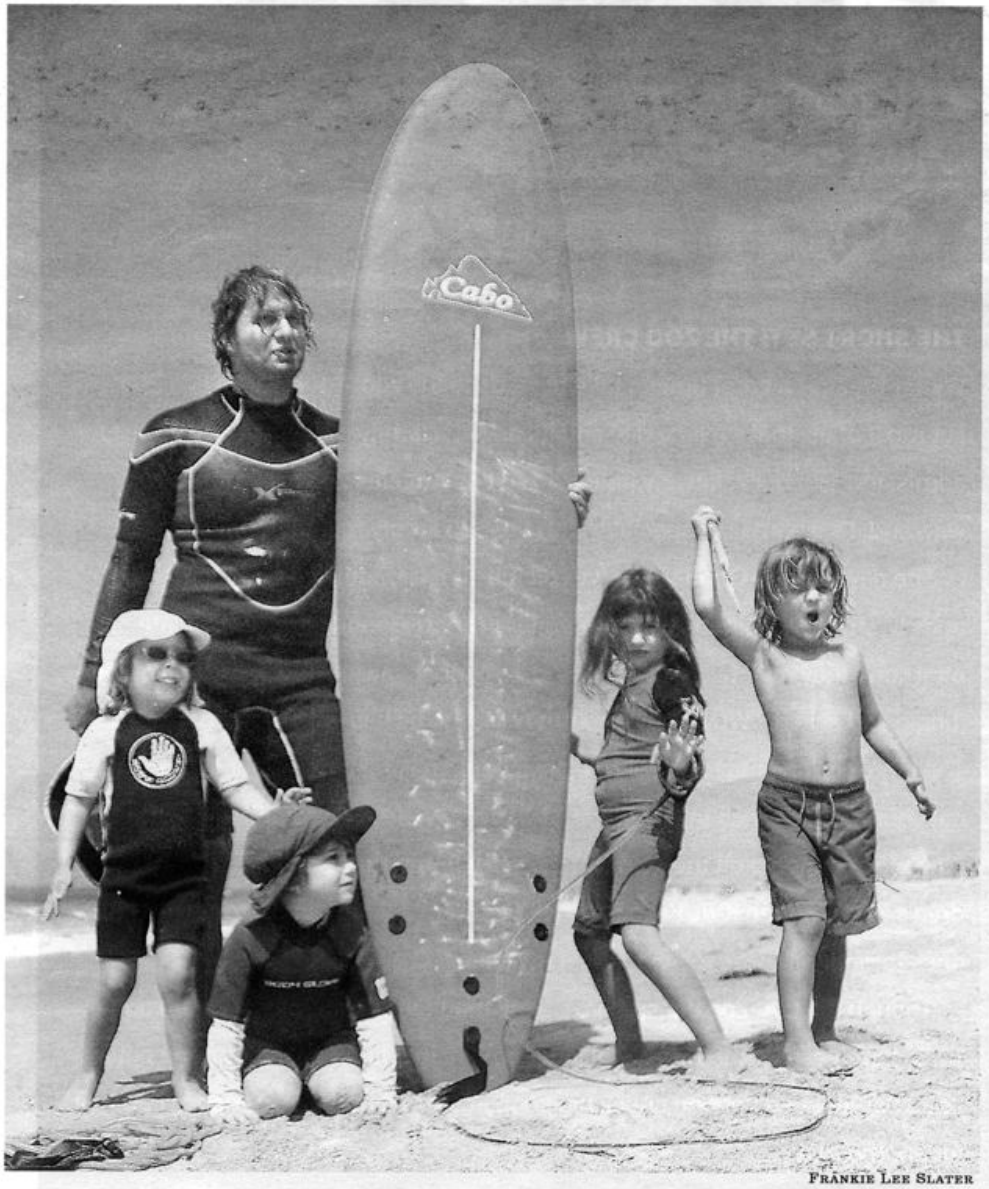
VENICE DEL PLAY

WHERE: Meet at the parking lot at 2600 Barnard Way, Venice.

WHEN: 9:30 a.m.-2:30 p.m. Wed.-next Fri.

PRICE: $75/full day; $60/half day; Advance reservations required.

INFO: (310) 821-7377; *www.venicedelplay.com*



FRANKIE LEE SLATER

Avid surfer and Venice del Play co-founder Sydney Lovelace teaches kids the ways of the waves.