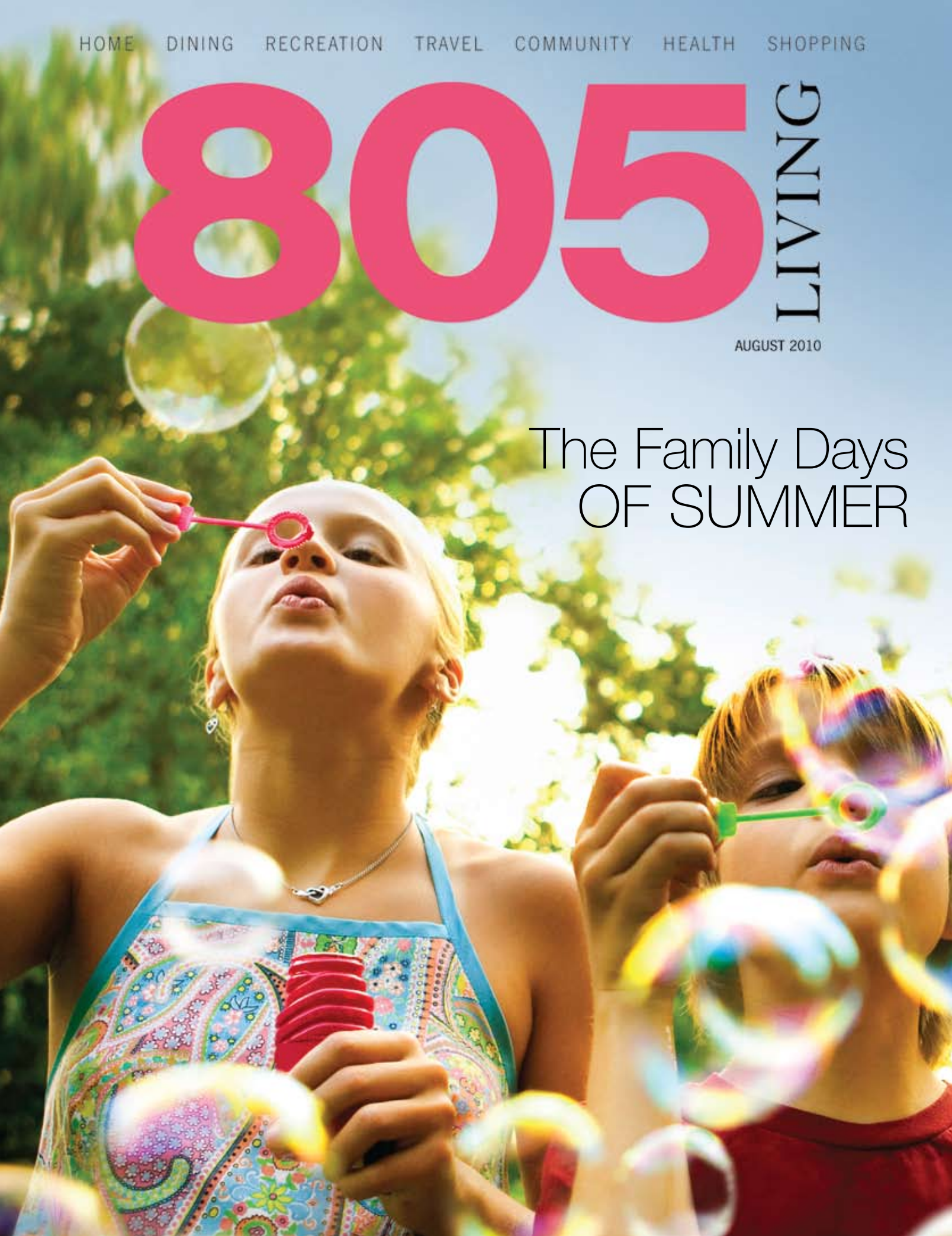


# 805 LIVING

AUGUST 2010

The Family Days  
OF SUMMER



## COLLEGE KNOW-HOW

Planning experts steer students along the path to admission.

**SEVENTEEN-YEAR-OLD CIERA LOWE** knew she wanted to major in engineering when she first met Deanna Kubit, college planner and founder of Off 2 College Now ([off2collegenow.com](http://off2collegenow.com)) in Westlake Village. Ciera, then a junior at Santa Susana High School in Simi Valley, even had a list of schools to which she wanted to apply. What Lowe didn't know at the time, however, was that fewer than 10 percent of applicants get into the schools she had on her list.

"Competition is fierce. There are 27,000 high schools across the country, which means 27,000 valedictorians are applying to college, and that's just the tip of the iceberg," says Kubit. "I helped Ciera skew her school selections. She had 'safety' ones and 'reach' ones."

Among the reach schools was well-regarded Cooper Union, a tuition-free private university in New York City that Kubit uncovered during research. Ciera and her parents had never heard of the school, but Kubit suggested she apply.

When Ciera received word last spring that she'd been admitted to Cooper Union's undergraduate engineering program, which is ranked third in the country, a celebration ensued. "Hiring Deanna was one of the best decisions my wife and I ever made," says Ciera's father Darrell, a lieutenant with the Santa Monica Police Department. "Her knowledge of the college entry process was invaluable. Not only does she have access to essay editors, she reminded Ciera of deadlines and appointments, and realized she'd be a good candidate for Cooper Union. Ciera took Deanna's input to heart, which probably wouldn't have been the case if the advice came from us. Having an unbiased perspective benefitted the whole family." (Ciera begins her freshman year at Cooper Union in September; she was also accepted to Purdue University, Boston University, and Cal Poly.)

Kubit is as pleased as the Lowes. As a former teacher, she's passionate about kids and enjoys helping identify what will make them happiest in the long-term: "If they do what's best for them, the more likely they'll be successful in life. The first thing I focus on with students is what they want to *be*, rather than what school they want to go to."

To help make it easier for teens to visualize the future, Kubit uses a step-by-step approach: Identify interests/career; select a few majors for consideration; narrow down school choices based on majors; and then address desired size and location of school.



One of her biggest tips for families is to visit school campuses at every opportunity. If trips to distant locations are out of the question, Kubit suggests taking tours nearby to get a sense of the differences between private and state schools and small and large campuses. For example, a strong science focus is immediately evident while walking through Caltech's campus ("You can just *feel* it," Kubit says), whereas a laid-back surfer vibe prevails at UCSB. Team spirit dominates the grounds at USC, where it's not unusual to hear students cheering: "Fight on!"

Far more can be learned on-campus in two hours than reading brochures, says Kubit, who recommends incorporating visits during spring break, family vacations, and sporting events—before senior year, if possible.

Naturally, the cost of college is a huge consideration for most parents. "I don't want to see anyone go into major debt for college," says Kubit, who once owned a retirement-planning business and is armed with information about financial assistance for students. Fewer than four percent of all Americans have saved more than \$5,000 toward their child's education, she says. The good news: The gap is closing between the cost of public and private schools, the latter of which offer many scholarships (and, as the Lowes discovered, even tuition-free schools exist). During local workshops that she hosts for free, Kubit addresses how financial aid works, as well as timelines for college applications.

Ideally, students begin working with Kubit during January of their junior year, which allows for enough time to complete personality tests, identify interests and goals, and submit targeted college applications. Some students make the mistake of waiting until junior year to improve grades, but GPAs are cumulative, which means grades should be a focus beginning in middle school, says Kubit. That said, grades aren't the complete picture. Colleges want well-rounded students who've pushed themselves in class and extracurricular activities. That doesn't mean students have to try a variety of activities; progressing through *one* activity and ultimately rising to a leadership position is far more advantageous. "Find something you like and stick with it," advises Kubit.

When it's time for students to write entrance essays, Kubit provides editorial input and guides the tone; for instance, there's a fine line between bragging and telling. She helps them recognize what life-changing events are (which is the typical essay topic), and how to stay focused on what they should communicate. Although students must write essays by themselves, Kubit facilitates professional critiques from former admissions directors. Not surprisingly, students shouldn't rush writing their essays; they need to take their time in order to leave a positive impression.

While Kubit believes the importance of a college education should be emphasized in the home, she also acknowledges that some students may not be ready for a four-year school shortly after graduation. "If they have to go to community college first, that's okay. Parents need to have realistic expectations, and understand that kids can get a good education at almost any college," she explains.

In fact, adds Kubit, it's not the college or degree that makes people successful; it's what they do with it. What matters most, she's been known to tell students, is attitude, diligence, and drive. ■

## Local Workshops and Seminars

To achieve phenomenal results from college applications, students have to be proactive, meet deadlines, and follow through, says Off 2 College Now founder Deanna Kubit. Now through November, she offers essay and application workshops for students, as well as free seminars for parents about financial aid and application timelines. She also provides free one-hour consultations for parents plus a personality assessment of their child. ([off2collegenow.com](http://off2collegenow.com))

## "The Key" to College Admissions

Rick Singer is CEO and master coach of The Key ([thekeyworldwide.com](http://thekeyworldwide.com)), a worldwide company dedicated to assisting families through the college application process. According to Singer, when schools review candidates they consider the following criteria, listed in order of importance:

- A rigorous and challenging high school curriculum
- A notable achievement in an extracurricular activity
- Class rank
- Grades
- SAT scores

## Other Resources

WACAC – Western Association for College Admission Counseling ([wacac.org](http://wacac.org))  
FAFSA – Free Application for Federal Student Aid ([fafsa.gov](http://fafsa.gov))



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