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When I Grow Up...

Local kids and parents discuss their hopes and dreams for the future.

By Lisa Beach

Down through the ages, parents and educators have posed a seemingly simple question to children: What do you want to be when you grow up? The query ignites the kids' imagination and fans the spark of their dreams as they contemplate their future.

Once upon a time, you'd expect to hear answers such as teacher, firefighter, or doctor. But these days, you might hear video-game programmer, fashion designer, or reality TV star. The answer to this simple question reveals a lot about gender stereotypes, the explosion of technology, and cultural influences, leaving the adults to ponder how times have changed.

To get a snapshot of the careers this generation aims for (at least according to the kids) as well as how well those hopes jibe with their parents' expectations, we reached out to several Central Florida families—and what they have to say might just surprise you.

Currey Family

Stats: Jeff and Tracey Currey, Winter Park, two kids

Anna, a fourth grader at Lake Highland Preparatory School, wants to be "...a professional U.S. lacrosse player, a U.S. lacrosse coach, and a Broadway star." She adds, "I can act and sing and dance!"

Ella, a sixth grader at Lake Highland, also aims to be "...a professional U.S. lacrosse player and U.S. lacrosse coach." Plus, she says, "I want to be a role model and own my own business or charity to help other children, like kids with cancer."

"I just want both of my girls to be leaders; to be confident, empowered women; and to have a service mindset toward others," says Tracey, an entrepreneur. "I hope they continue to step into the people they are now—kind, hard-working and detail-oriented. My true wish for them is that they stay connected to that power and self-confidence. It's not so much about what they'll do with their lives, but being confident in who they are."

Venegas Family

Stats: Jose and Angela Venegas, Orlando, two kids

Lucca Venegas, a fourth grader at Orlando Junior Academy, wants to be a roboticist because "...robots are really cool and they can do anything!"

"Our dreams for him?" says Angela, a pediatrician. "No particular career choice. But our expectation of him is to go to college and/or graduate school. And to be the best that he can be at whatever he chooses."

Robinson Family

Stats: Russell and Beth Robinson, Casselberry, four kids

Steven, a seventh grader at St. Luke's Lutheran School, hasn't pinpointed his dreams yet, but he's previously expressed an interest in architecture.

"As the youngest, and the furthest away from 'growing up,' I haven't focused too much on Steven's future yet," says Beth, who handles the accounting for her husband's business. "Can't just one of them stay little forever?" Beth further notes that Steven enjoys math, chess and Rubik's Cubes, and accordingly thinks he might be a math teacher or a chess coach.

Peter, a ninth grader at Oviedo High School, doesn't know his future path either, but will probably do "something in science." He's enjoying this year's biology and bioscience courses, so that's a good possibility.

"I see Peter working on the fringe of the entertainment industry. In his free time, he paints Nerf guns and creates cool props," says Beth. "I could picture him working at one of the theme parks in town, maybe designing guest experiences or creating rides or props."

Sladek Family

Stats: Paul and Megan Sladek, Oviedo, two kids

Carson, a second grader at Lawton Elementary School, is eyeing an easy career: He wants to be retired. His mother Megan, a real-estate



The Sladek Family

broker, thinks he might be destined for greater things, though.

"I see Carson doing something where 'reading' people is a key element," she says. "He's a good negotiator and excellent at sensing emotions, so maybe sales of some sort? Not something typical, but maybe sales of something wild, like spacecraft. I could also see him being something of a lobbyist."

Charlotte, a fifth grader at Lawton, wants to be a veterinarian because she loves animals and wants to pet them all day long.

"I can see Charlotte as an engineer or something power-related," Megan says. "She can break things down, and there are times when she likes explaining things to others. She has crazy mad verbal and writing skills, which would really play well in an industry where a lot of people are so tech-oriented."

Miller Family

Stats: Todd and Shannon Miller, Oviedo, three kids
Ashley, a fifth grader at Rainbow Elementary, shows a passion for animals and wants to be a veterinarian.

"Ashley is a motivated, driven child," says Shannon, a pharmacist. "She loves taking care of babies and animals, so I could see her in a nurturing field like healthcare."

Matthew, a seventh grader at Indian Trails Middle School, also expressed interest in becoming a veterinarian—or a kicker for the Gators.

"I can see Matthew in the healthcare field because he's really compassionate," explains Shannon. "I wonder if having the medical background in our family planted the seeds for my two youngest."

Arauz Family

Stats: Steven Arauz, Orlando, one kid

Quinton, a fifth grader at Orlando Junior Academy, wants to be a doctor or policeman because he'd like to stop the pain in our country, stop the



The Arauz Family

criminals who hurt people, and then maybe cure children who have lots of pain due to illness. He wants to help others smile again.

"I would love for him to grow up and view other people as his mission in life, to choose any career that will lead him to be of good use in our community," says Steven, a teacher. "It doesn't really matter what profession he chooses, as long as he loves his job, is of service to the community, and is the best he can be."

Mehta Family

Stats: Udgit and Ameer Mehta, Oviedo, two kids

Maanya, a second grader at Seminole Science Charter School, dreams to be a dentist like her aunt. Ever since losing her first tooth, Maanya has been very curious about how teeth are created and how to brush them well.

"Our dream for Maanya is to become a scientist—either a researcher or doctor/dentist," explains Udgit, a business manager. "We hope to see her achieve something that could help society, both spiritually and medically, and earn money to help her family. This is why we put her in a STEM-based charter school."

Bell Family

Stats: Shane and Tracy Bell, Chuluota, one kid

Ella, a preschooler at Ladybird Academy, loves the TV show *Doc McStuffin*, and she's all about the doctor world right now. For Halloween, she donned her own lab coat and stethoscope and dressed up as a physician.

"We want what all parents want—for our child to be happy and successful," says Tracy, an electronic medical-record analyst. "We can pave the pathway for her to be successful in school, but we would never tell her what she can or can't be."

Lisa Beach is a freelance writer, humor blogger, mother of two teenagers, and recovering homeschool mom who lived to write about it. More of her writing can be found at LisaBeachWrites.com and TweenMoments.com.

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