

Cedar Ridge Hosts YES! Camp for Teens

By Scott Laird

Cedar Ridge Camp in Vernonia recently hosted a week-long experience for teens. The YES! Camp, (Youth Empowerment Seminar) was held during Spring Break from March 20-25 and is a new opportunity that Cedar Ridge is exploring. From the looks of things, this first trial was a great success.

The YES! Spring Break Camp was facilitated by the International Association for Human Values (IAHV), a non-profit committed to enhancing the quality of life for all people by building a global community based on the human values we all share in common, while celebrating the diversity of cultural and religious identities.

Through education and outreach programs, IAHV aims to revive human values that include a sense of belonging to a common humanity, respect and consideration for all people, compassion and non-violence, a commitment to preserving the natural environment, and a social service ethic.

One component of IAHV's work is their Youth Empowerment Seminars for schools, a dynamic program that provides teens with a comprehensive set of tools to manage their emotions. YES! broadens young people's vision of the world and provides practical knowledge and skills they need to realize their highest potential.

in schools, and served as a camp councilor for the week at Cedar Ridge. "It's also very fun. It's really a way for kids to start to understand and have an awareness about how their mind, their feelings, their breath and their body are all connected. It's about giving these



Campers enjoy a healthy meal at Cedar Ridge during the YES! Spring Break Camp

tools to kids now, so that now, and when they are adults, they can live a really healthy life, full of enthusiasm and opportunity."

"In a way, it's like planting a seed— these are things they can come back to and use later in their life," continues Kaharick.

According to the IAHV website, the school program has been extremely successful. "We all want students to

that students are not able to focus on academics because of stress which is expressed in different ways: acting out, attention-seeking, depression, anxiety, fatigue due to lack of proper sleep, poor attendance etc... Through YES!'s stress-relieving techniques, students feel

calmer and more alert. A state of calmness and alertness is the ideal state in which to learn because the mind becomes receptive to new information.

Making the program fit school schedules is challenging. "We have to be flexible," explains

Kaharick. "We don't change the program, but we adjust how we deliver it, so that every school can accommodate it."

The camp in Vernonia was a totally different experience. "Unlike the schools where, usually we are with the students for one period at a time, here we get to be with them 24/7 and see how they operate in an environment which is both calming, because they're out in nature, but at the same time, is almost volatile because they are out of their comfort zone and they're rooming with diverse people," says Justin McGurrin, who also teaches the YES! Program in schools and acted as a camp councilor at

Cedar Ridge. "So we really get to see people's true colors and their colors when they're pushed. "It's an ideal situation to teach this course."

The camp in Vernonia mixed instruction in healthy eating habits, exercise, and breathing techniques, as well as play-acting and skits, games, rope course challenges and other camp activities like basketball, hikes, and singing campsongs.

"What was really great about the camp experience was having the time and space to really get to know each student on a personal level," said Kaharick. "Getting to see how they interact with the other students. Ultimately, for me as an instructor, it was very interesting, because I was here with them, to see how they would apply the techniques in their social circles throughout the day."

Cedar Ridge owners Britt and Larry Steele say they are very excited to be able to offer the Camp at Cedar Ridge. "We felt this first week was really rewarding and we got positive feedback from everybody—the teachers and councilors, the participants and our staff," said Larry Steele. "We're very excited to offer this, not just to the Portland area, but to kids from all around the country and probably even internationally."

According to Steele, Cedar Ridge plans to bring back the camp again this summer, with the YES! Camp for Teens and a variation of the camp for 8-12-year-olds sometime in July and August; details are still being finalized. They also plan to hold camps next year during Spring Break.



The YES! Camp that Cedar Ridge hosted was an intensive version of the twenty-hour school program.

"It's a program for teens and young adults where they learn tools and techniques to manage their mind, their emotions and their feelings in a healthy and positive way," explains Natalie Kaharick, who has taught the program

succeed in academics, reading, writing, mathematics, etc., so traditionally we take the direct approach. We put more and more emphasis on pushing our students to learn. For some, this has worked, yet for many it has not worked. We have not taught our students the tools or techniques to increase their learning capacity. In classrooms, we often see



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