

Special program for special children

Kiwanis Clubs plan \$1.5 million expansion of Mt. Hood camp

Story and Photos
by Von Braschler

Mt. Hood Kiwanis Camp near Rhododendron brings the smiles of summertime camping to the faces of handicapped and retarded children. Area Kiwanis clubs intend to broaden those smiles with a \$1.5 million expansion project.

The camp is one of few in the country that offers a week-long residential camping experience to handicapped children. Perhaps even more unique is the camp's 2 to 1 ratio of trained counselors per child.

Presently, however, there room for only 35 camper and 14 counselors for each of eight weeks, with crowded quarters for those few.

The 41 Kiwanis clubs in the greater Portland area intend to remedy all of that in a three-phase building project to convert the present main building as a museum and construct four clusters of cabins in a new year-round program to facilitate different groups and ages.

The program part of a 15-year plan, money for which

is expected in three years of Kiwanis fund-raising.

Volunteer work parties comprised of Kiwanis fund-raising.

Volunteer work parties comprised of Kiwanis members and friends will start this fall with camp shutdown Aug. 18. Construction and insulation of a well house and a maintenance building is the first priority.

With mild winter weather the Kiwanis will work straight through spring, as they did last year with completion of a girls' restroom, new roof for the freezer and dry storage and drilling for a 60-gallon well to improve the camp's previous well capacity of seven gallons.

The camp's present staff of counselors come from Portland State University, Iowa State and the University of Washington is a program that gives the children trained supervision and guidance in dealing with their various handicaps.

The college students return with behavioral analysis study and experience for university credit in either physical

education or special education.

Present tight quarters of sleeping in temporary trailers and tents with the children, as the new 200-bed capacity camp envisions, is a

SUPERVISED FUN The children's play area appears relaxed and informal, with time for fishing in the camp's own shallow pond, bicycling, archery range, arts and crafts area, swimming pool, volleyball field and basketball court.

But everywhere the children go, the counselors follow with clipboard and pen. They encourage the children to run a little faster, pick up trail litter, or play a game they never played before.

With a close 2-to-1 camper counselor ratio, they encourage the children to come out of their shells and enjoy the world around them. That is much praise and positive feedback progress along the way.

Twice a week the counselors join the children in "show-off time" when the skills performed in front of

the camp and visiting Kiwanis and friends on a stage outside by a roaring campfire.

"We used to invite the parents, but that proved too traumatic for the children," said camp director Chuck Kuhnhausen, a learning specialist for north Clackamas schools who joined the camp five summers ago.

If a parent failed to show, the child would be heartbroken, but more often the case was that of a child inhibited by his parent's sudden appearance.

The parents receive a copy of the behavioral analysis reports on the children's regular teachers and Portland State University Dept. of Special Education.

The university coordinates the educational aspect of the camp and teaches the student counselors to deal with the handicapped and retarded campers ages 9-18.

HELP FOR PARENTS The reports enable the parents to better relate to the camper when he returns home, so they can

talk over the things (little drills) on the list," Kuhnhausen said.

The drills cover everything from a child's efforts to catch and clean a fish to planning a skit.

A Thursday night awards assembly outdoors after skits acknowledges everything from "fastest wheels (wheelchair) in camp to 'fastest blueberry picker' and 'most eager camper'."

Kuhnhausen tells a story of a boy who spent a speechless summer at camp, returned more communicative the second year, and floored the camp his third year by actually getting up during skits night with Kuhnhausen to sing a Harry Belafonte song.

"We see real improvement here," Kuhnhausen said. The campers even pack up their bedrolls to overnight away from the camp one night during their week.

And efforts are underway to construct a safe sliding rope crossing over the camp's fishpond whereby campers in safety harness experience the

thrill of something daring.

MAKE A WISH Toward the end of the week, the campers spend one night sailing paper boats across that pond. As they send out the boats, each makes a special wish.

Next year, the camp expects with spring construction to accept a few more campers and to house counselors in permanent facilities.

The year-round camp, when completed, will be able to accept adults and could group entire camps according to common handicaps, Kuhnhausen said.

A speech therapy facility may be included in the new camp.

Kuhnhausen said that the main building will be converted to a museum to commemorate the camp's long history and the Barlow Trail which crossed the camp's Barlow Park area.

With the park, leased cost-free from the Forest Service, the camp now consists of 13 acres, which will be adequate for expansion plans.

The camp itself is historic as a lodge to house W.P.A. workers who built Timberline Lodge. The camp then became a Kiwanis camp for disadvantaged or delinquent children.

When the government became involved in work with disadvantaged children in the 1960's, the camp was converted to a summer facility for handicapped children.

The camp works closely with the Forest Service which provides a storyteller for the children and supervises handicapped teenagers in a special Student Worker Vocational Program.

Some 18 youths worked with the rangers this summer to prepare trails and clean up in nearby areas like Tollgate Camp Ground and Middle Lake Trail.

SOCIAL SKILLS The program is federally funded through Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (CETA), and provides the youths aged 15-18 with work experience to develop "social and self-help skills," according to Kuhnhausen.

The teenagers, who are both mildly and moderately retarded, also receive summer training in grounds maintenance, food preparation, custodial work, and counseling as counselor-trainees.

Despite the \$15 registration fee charged each camper, the camp costs \$43,000 a year to operate at its present capacity.



Fun at the camp's archery range.



Group game time.



Testing pond crossing



Getting on stage.



Practice rolling a sleeping bag.



Mt. Hood Crippled Children's Camp, in the shadow of Mt. Hood



Discussing a skit for tonight.



Everyone plays ball.