

Rotary Camp Onseyawa 2008 Annual Report

Introduction

The 53rd year of Rotary Camp Onseyawa was full of adventures. Once again the administration and most of the program staff returned for another year. This is beneficial to the beginning of a new camp year because there becomes a bounty of resources for new staff.

We had many new staff this year including medical staff, counselors and kitchen assistants. They were able to learn their responsibilities rather quickly and camp as a result ran very smoothly.

Recruitment this year brought us 103 campers however on August 11th, opening day for the campers, we had only 94 arrive. Many families changed plans at the last minute and we unfortunately did not get the number of campers we had hoped for. There is an issue as well with some of the campers attending summer school and their parents not wanting to take them out of school. They are often times discouraged by Teachers or Therapists who will lose money if they are not able to provide their service to the child. That is a tough decision for a family and one that doesn't occur every year. It happens usually when camp begins in early August as it has the past few years. I predict this may be a problem again next year because opening day for campers will be August 10th.

Due to the lower enrollment of campers we recruited less counseling staff. This year it was tough getting new staff and we had to advertise in local newspapers. Fortunately, this brought some good staff our way. I hired a woman who was referred to me by Walt Agnew from the Walworth Rotary Club. She had been a camper in the 60's and it was always her dream to return one day as a staff member. At 62 years old Virginia Kellock became one of our most valued staff members. She exemplified enthusiasm and perseverance each day and served as a wonderful role model to our entire camp.

Some important staff anniversaries were recognized this year.

1. Joe Baldwin, a long time Sr. Counselor and now the program supervisor at the Rifle Range marked his 45th year on staff at the age of 71.
2. Dave Bush retired after 25 years as the program supervisor at Frontier Living at the age of 70.
3. Scott Hollman, a valued Unit Leader, celebrated his 25th anniversary this year.
4. Dawn Proper, a former camper who serves now as the program supervisor for Ceramics marked her 36th year on staff.
5. Annette and Rose Briggs, former campers, who now assist with the Ceramics and Arts and Crafts programs, marked their 26th year as staff members.
6. Todd Rutan, former Program Director and now the program supervisor for the Podcast Program returned for his 28th year with camp.

There is 32 staff that has been with camp 5 years or more. Of those 32 there are 11 with over 20 years experience. I am honored to work with professional staff that has this level of experience and commitment to Camp Onseyawa. It is directly attributed to the dedication of the staff and the Rotarians that camp is honored with such a wonderful reputation.

This year, once again, we had some parents of campers join our staff. They are the staff that gives us insightful information about working with children with disabilities. They assisted us in orientation this year on a Parent Panel and were valued resources to the

staff when working with their children. These parents demonstrate and understand patience, enthusiasm and hard work. They are camper advocates and live daily according to the motto of **Service Above Self**.

Program

Tracy McConnell returned for her third year as Program Director. She directed an outstanding camp program this year along with Erik Horton, who was her Assistant Program Director. It is an extremely challenging task to come up with the theme for camp and then gain the support and assistance throughout the year from staff to develop it. The theme this year was The Wacky, Crazy Days of the Year. The premise was that Father Time was upset with Mother Time and hanging around with a crazy troll named Kleptoweasha. It was the camper's duty to find out who Father Time is so we could return to August before camp came to an end.

Tracy is an expert in program development and has had a very creative program staff, most of which have been with her the past three years. By time camp started and the programs were executed campers and staff eagerly anticipated the daily surprises, mysteries, practical jokes and chaos. The silliness, the willingness of staff to do anything to make the campers laugh and the total inclusiveness, which all her activities offer, was the recipe for the successful program she brought to Onseyawa this year.

This year a new **Sensory Program** was held at camp. It was developed and supervised by a long time staff member, Cheryl Albright, who is an Occupational Therapist for the Mary Cariola Center in Rochester. Her expertise with working with children with sensorial deficits and her experience with Camp Onseyawa combined allowed for this program to be a favorite and uniquely beneficial to all campers. I had the good fortune to spend a period in her program with a group of 13-14 year old boys. The opportunities and variety of activities she had with large gross motor materials enhanced fun in a way that is not readily available to these kids within their daily environments. She also had smaller gross motor activities for those that preferred to be bit less rambunctious. It is my hope that she will be a future guest speaker and present to you the value of her unique program. I am certainly not able to do it justice with the little I've said.

The **Podcast** was up and running thanks to Todd Rutan, camp's 28 year staff veteran, and technical expert. He had a new podcast program each day of camp and you can still see those podcasts by going to the website www.onseyawa.org. It truly gives you an open door into camp and what goes on while the campers are there. As a Rotarian or a family member there is no better oversight, aside from an actual visit, than to tune in and watch to see if you are pleased with what you see.

A surprise to the daily routine was added when I traded places with a counselor, Liam Cerveny, for the day. Liam was required to perform an independent study for his college in the field of working with kids with disabilities. As his supervisor for this study, I thought it would be fun for him and the camp to have him experience the day in the shoes of a Camp Director. After all, he had been a counselor for a couple of years now and had been a program staff member at another camp. I felt learning the responsibilities of a camp director would provide him a unique insight into the operations of a camp for children with disabilities. To do this it meant I needed to take his place in his unit as a counselor. I had not done that role myself since 1980. It was a well-kept secret until the

day we did it. At the end of this experiment we both agreed we were best suited for the jobs we have. I was physically exhausted after running around with the campers all day and he was eager to get back to his comfort zone with the campers who had missed him terribly on this day. This will be a lasting memory we will share and laugh about for years to come.

The Carnival this year was a huge success. Several Rotary Clubs set up booths with activities for campers to enjoy. Additionally, we had a magician donate his services and provided a fun magic show for the campers. The Geneva YMCA lent us the use of their Bounce House, which was a popular activity on that day for campers and young visitors to the camp.

During the second week of camp we had a Talent Show where campers performed on a stage songs, dances, acrobats and comedy routines. It was very inspirational and meant so much to the campers to have this opportunity to shine and be recognized for their talents. The last day of camp was Backwards Day. When campers arrived behind the dining hall in the morning we first held the flag lowering ceremony. Once they entered the dining hall for breakfast it began with ice cream. After dessert out came hotdogs and what would typically be the dinner meal. At dinner the flag was raised and we enjoyed a delicious breakfast.

At last, on the final day the puzzle of who was Father Time was solved. Piecing together all the clues led us to the culprit, Craig Wulfert. Known to be a mischievous counselor, he was given a consequence for his antics and the confusion he brought to Camp Onseyawa. Campers delighted in watching him be made into an Ice Cream Sundae!!!

Camps success each year is due to so many wonderful people.

- The campers provide us the reason to persevere in having this very special camp. They receive such joy and acceptance from camp. They appreciate all who bring them this opportunity each year.
- The families put their trust in us allowing us to offer their children the opportunity to have a typical camp experience they are not able to get anywhere else. Their lives are enhanced by the respite opportunity camp is able to provide.
- The staff make it part of their lives to come to camp and learn from these children. In doing this they enrich their lives as professionals. They make it their goal to teach campers that anything is possible and they share with them unconditional love and acceptance.
- The Rotarians mission is to seek and provide the financial support to offer a camp program to the disabled children in Ontario, Seneca, Yates and Wayne counties. They have a huge job that requires time, commitment, collaboration, advocacy and long range planning to ensure that Camp Onseyawa is here to stay.
- The Boy Scouts generously give us a home that we call Camp Onseyawa each August. They have been our partners in making this camp possible for the children.

- The Gollisano Foundation made a generous contribution of \$10,000.00 to Camp Onseyawa this year. With that contribution we were able to enhance the programs offered to the campers. It is the pursuit of such contributions to camp that will allow us the opportunity to bring new and innovative programs to camp. We will also be able to update our current equipment in areas such as Archery, Arts and Crafts, Sensory, Technology and Medical supplies.
- Due to the generosity of the \$1500.00 donation we receive each year from the Seneca Falls Rotary Club we have developed a dynamic hands on photography program for the campers. Campers all leave camp with a CD from camp and this year we were able to purchase a new computer for the photography program to use. Staff has been using their personal laptops, which is a liability that should not be expected from staff.

Conclusion

It will continue to be a challenge to recruit campers and staff each year. Hopefully, I will be able to reach out to more of the areas that do not have a Rotary Club in their communities. I want to thank Rotarians, staff and families for their anticipated recruiting efforts. Please direct people you talk to interested in learning about Camp Onseyawa to the website at www.onseyawa.org. Applications for campers and staff can be downloaded directly from this website.

Now, as I put to close my report from Camp 2008, I eagerly look forward to the planning for next year's camp. It is so comforting to know that I have many staff that has the same goal. Before we concluded camp this year many ideas were generated and our creative juices were sparked. Amongst those ideas was the development of new program activities for older campers. As these children get older it is a challenge to keep them stimulated when they do not have cognitive disabilities. Consequently, at times the older kids may become bored and decide they may not want to return to camp. We have done a good job, engaging these kids, however, we can do better. The older teen years are tough. They are often filled with feelings of isolation and exclusion. They are in a limbo between that of a child and an adult. We need to reach out to these campers by increasing our efforts to develop age appropriate activities that specifically target the oldest campers. I think this makes sense and with the creative staff we have it is a task I feel we are well equipped to tackle in the upcoming years.

I submit the following recommendations for Camp Onseyawa 2009:

1. Ongoing camper and staff recruitment
2. Ongoing support to the program development for the 2009 camp session
3. Initiate this year the development of new and unique programs for older campers

Respectfully submitted,

Sandy Ottley
Camp Onseyawa Director

