



VIEW FROM THE HILL

Updated Thoughts from the Thoughtful Day Camp

“The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others.” Mahatma Gandhi

Welcome to our first update of the New Year! We hope your holidays were warm and pleasant. We hope this update finds your family healthy and happy. The health and happiness of our camp families are certainly on our minds just as the gravity of the pandemic situation worsens and the roll-out of vaccines gives us hope. Concern for how all of this will impact the summer is surely on everyone’s long-range radar.

I recently attended a Youth Camp Safety Advisory Council meeting with the leadership staff of the Office of Early Childhood and volunteer council members representing the variety of camps in the state—day, resident, university, private-independent, agency, etc. The big topics covered were worries over the impact on resident camps if they are not allowed to open for a second season; the OEC’s Commissioner’s support of camps that provide a positive experience for children and support for families; the expectation that when the state’s vaccination Phase 1b is announced it is expected to include childcare and youth camp staff along with teachers and other “essential employees”. Commissioner Bye explained that she hopes camps can operate this summer and that the decision of whether or not they will be allowed to open will be made by the Governor’s Advisory Council with input from the Dept of Public Health. There was no talk about restricting day camps from operating in the manner we employed last summer. In fact, it was mentioned that day camps would likely be allowed to open earlier than usual--as soon as schools dismiss for the summer. What with hybrid learning, cancelled vacations, and no snow days in many districts, day camps may be able to open as early as June 14! At Holiday Hill, we are preparing for that scenario, though we won’t open enrollment for those extra weeks until we get official permission. The Youth Camp Safety Advisory Council typically meets four times a year but will meet monthly through the winter and spring to keep abreast of developments affecting camps and families.

I was struck by the efforts that the OEC Commissioner and staff were making in service of support to the camp industry and their belief in the value that camps provide in serving families and children. It brought the idea of “service” to mind and thus the theme of this post.

Holiday Hill participated in a charitable event with the Mansfield Area Lions just before the holidays. The motto of the Lions Clubs International—the world’s largest service organization with 1.3 million members in 46,000 clubs in 202 countries and geographic areas worldwide—is “We Serve”. On a rainy Saturday in December, we served 260 U.S. Department of Agriculture prepared, 30 lb. food boxes to people in Ashford, Willington, and Mansfield. Statewide, Lions delivered 5000 boxes. The Mansfield distribution site was at Holiday Hill where 200 boxes were given away.

Holiday Hill has a long record of service with the Lions, having hosted events at the camp for over 60 years. This year our annual Fall Festival fundraiser was, like so many other events, a victim of COVID-19. With no money to offer those in need, we relied on our limited physical abilities—the average age in our club is over 70—and our desire to serve. Our five able-bodied members got the boxes from Colchester to camp where, like a holiday miracle, some twenty non-members arrived to pitch in! One camp counselor got wind of the project and enlisted a handful of E.O. Smith National Honors Society volunteers. The counselor’s parents came along, too! One of our CIT’s and several former campers—now adults in the community—also helped. Plus, several non-member Lions Club supporters who just wanted to pitch in. The gratitude of the recipients and the joy of serving others made for goodwill all around.

Here’s an activity you might try with your family to explore service to each other: “Servant Meal”

I have used this exercise in ropes course facilitation trainings with great success. In such trainings we are trying to heighten facilitators’ perception skills in regard to the needs of others—physically and emotionally—as required of leaders of challenge course activities. With so much time spent together as families at home during these pandemic times, this can be a fun way to spend an evening together.

In a nutshell, the activity invites your family to sit together for a meal. Family members will be serving each other all of the components of the meal. No one is allowed to take or ask for what they want. There will be a post-meal discussion over dessert.

I encourage you to try the “[Servant Meal](#)” with your family sometime soon! [Click here](#) for full details.

Suggested podcast listening to help deal with difficult times:

[Hidden Brain –Minimizing Pain, Maximizing Joy](#)

Thanks for checking in. Watch for future updates. Contact us with any questions.

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