

GOOD THINGS

a rafters project magazine



RAFTERSPROJECT

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Director's Letter

There is no greater gift to give a child than the feeling and knowledge that they are specially loved and made by God.

It is critically important for young people today to know who they are and where their value actually comes from. Camp has always been a place that highlights how special it is to be a child of God. I believe that within the Camp experience, kids are able to find out who they really are and what God says about them.

Kids come to Camp from a world that bombards them with messages about creating their own identity, being unique, and making sure everyone else knows how special they are on their social media feeds. The world we live in points kids to a life of achievement and accumulation in order to be valuable and relevant. We need to shift the paradigm for kids from “who we are is based on what we do” into a view that is “what we do is based on who we are.”

Ephesians 5:1... “therefore imitate God as beloved children.”

This summer our theme is **BELOVED**, and we want to highlight and dive into our identity as God’s beloved children. Using Ephesians 5:1 as a starting point, my prayer is that we are able to encourage kids with the truth that they are beloved by God, and that this fact is the most important thing about who they are. It is based on that identity that we imitate God as we live a life of love – encouraging, serving, and blessing the people around us. Like I said earlier, what we do (imitate God) comes out of who we are (beloved children of God).

Your support is such a blessing to this ministry. You are helping us provide this life changing experience to over 1,500 campers this summer. Your donations each month ultimately go toward one purpose: to help kids learn about their deepest, truest identity as a beloved child of God. There is so much power and impact in that message. Thank you for giving so that every kid that comes to Camp Deer Run this summer can see and experience God, pure & simple.

Please continue to pray for our efforts as camper approaches, and make plans to visit us for Pass the Torch night or a Middle Sunday!

MyFaD





flagpole devo

BY SID WALKER
STAFF 1982-83 & RAFTERS PROJECT MEMBER

Do you have a group of close-knit friends, a band of brothers or soul sisters? I'm not an absolute believer that friends have to be forever, some are definitely for a season, but I am convinced that we cannot make life's journey without others walking alongside us. The stats are staggering and getting worse for those trying to fly solo - loneliness, depression, suicide. I'm not saying it can't be done, but many are trying to "go it alone," and failing.

From the very beginning, we were made for community. The Lord God said, "It is not good for man to be alone" (Genesis 2:18). Even the original Being was the Trinity - Father, Son, Spirit. Consider Jesus. He had an inner circle of 3 (Peter, James, John), the 12 apostles and about 70 followers he called disciples. So, who are your people?

In January 2024 I was part of group of guys meeting weekly on a one-hour Zoom call. It was started as a 12-week commitment to grow as Jesus did in Luke 2:52 and to hold each other accountable through the process. After the 3-month commitment, we decided to keep going. After 6 months no one wanted to quit. We had grown to depend on one another by sharing, confessing and praying together, but mostly for accountability. Each week we had an assignment, which we took seriously because we knew the first

thing required when we report-in each week was to tell the group how we did. And nobody wanted to let the group down. We are now in our second year together.

"As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another" (Proverbs 27:17).

One of the first meaningful and significant group of friends that continues to have an impact on me was the Deer Run Staff 1982. I was in the Corps of Cadets at A&M and part of my Army commitment was "summer camp" at Fort Riley, KS. On the 3rd day we were formerly processed with a physical. Due to a torn tendon in a finger on my left hand, I was released and faced with a free summer. When I arrived home, my dad informed me that Mr. Smith from Camp Deer Run had called and wanted me to call him back. We spoke on a Saturday and he informed

me that they lost a counselor because he threw his back out while playing Flying Dutchman. Even though I had no idea what that meant, I was eager for the opportunity to spend the rest of the summer at Deer Run. My sister, Becky Walker Elkins, had worked a couple of previous

summers and made it sound like a good experience. The hurt counselor, who became a very close friend, was Dale Butler, who we lost to cancer not long ago (Bubba D - thanks for the memories!).

Fortunately, I didn't screw things up too terribly and was asked to return for the Summer of 1983.

Our theme for the summer was Hebrews 12:1-2, which we most often simplified to "fix your eyes on Jesus." Great memories and great friends. My sister returned for an encore summer as Head Women's Counselor and I was blessed with an inner circle of a few, a larger group that I see occasionally, then the entire staff that made the summer a success. To some extent, these are still my people.

The Question of the Day: Who Are Your People? Yours may be family, which is beautiful. It may be a small group at church, a breakfast bunch, a book club, or a supper club. A bigger group may be a Bible class, a ministry, or church. But I sincerely hope you have a group. I cannot imagine life without friends.

From the very beginning, we were made for community. The Lord God said, "It is not good for man to be alone."

"I no longer call you servants because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends" (Jesus, John 15:15).

Young-ish

For the past two years, on the first weekend of March, we have hosted Camp Deer Run's new retreat - The Young Alumni Retreat. The idea for the weekend was born from a desire to keep campers and staff who have recently ended their Deer Run careers from feeling like there was no place for them here anymore.

It's easy to leave Camp and see how it moves on without you, and feel disillusioned and disconnected. It's also easy to come visit camp and feel old - much older than you really are! So we created this retreat to remind our 21 - 35 year old alumni that they're not (that) old yet, that they still have an important place in this family, and that, especially in the busyness of your 20s and 30s, it's vital to take time to connect to the Vine and to fellow believers.

The retreat has been a huge success, and we have loved seeing unity in this group despite the huge variety of it. There have been

21-year-olds fresh off their last summer on staff and 35-year-olds who have been away from Camp for more than a decade now. There have been singles, newlyweds, and parents of young kids. There have been former staff, former campers, and spouses that have never camped or staffed at all. But they have all been united in the simple fact that God has changed their lives through their experience (or their spouse's) at Camp Deer Run.

This year, former Summer Staff member and Full-Time Facilities Manager, Drayton Hoffman, joined us with his wife Kristin to provide spiritual encouragement and devotional thoughts.

It is truly a special weekend, and we are so excited that it has quickly established itself as a meaningful, relaxing, and fun weekend for our young adult Deer Runners. We are also thankful that many of the people in this group are already members of the Rafter's Project, and that after this year's retreat, four more decided to join!

For more info about the retreat, visit www.campdeerrun.com/alumni

WE WANT YOU

to visit Camp Deer Run this summer!

pass the torch

DATE: May 24th
TIME: 5 pm - 9 pm
DETAILS: Pass the Torch is a special tradition that marks the starting point of the summer! After a week of orientation, Staff are ready to welcome the first campers of the summer on Sunday afternoon. but before their work begins, we welcome alumni, family, and supporters to join us on Saturday evening to encouraging and pray for our Staff. The event is free to attend and dinner will be included. We'd love to see you there! RSVP now with the QR code below!

middle sundays

DATES: June 8th, June 29th, July 13th
TIME: 10 am - 2 pm
DETAILS: On Sundays during two week sessions, hundreds of people come to visit Camp for worship, lunch, Hymn Time, and some good Deer Run fellowship. We would love to see all of our Rafter's Project members at Camp this summer during a Middle Sunday. We would love to visit with you, and we always love for people to come and be reminded of all the ways that God is working at Camp Deer Run. So save the dates and mark your calendar! See you there!

"During my time on staff, Pass the Torch was always something I cherished because every time I was reminded of how God has blessed Camp through so many generations. It was humbling as a young staff member to recognize that it is only through the blessings of God that Camp is what it is today."
GREYSON BARNETT





family tradition

THE BROWN FAMILY'S GENERATIONAL LEGACY OF SERVICE

"Growing up, there was never a time that I remember not knowing about camp. Like it was always a part of our lives."

Not many people can say that they have been Deer Runners since birth, but Kaylie (Brown) Singer can. Some of her earliest memories are from Camp – running around as a toddler when her grandparents, DeWayne and Karen Brown, came out for Board Meetings or being an eternal PeeWee when she was four years old for the summer that her mom, Marcie Brown, came out of Summer Staff retirement to be the PeeWee Mama.

As you can probably already tell, this is a family story – one that spans three generations of Browns, and it starts in 1984 when Dewayne, Karen, and 9-year-old Marcie moved to Gilmer, Texas, and started attending the Gilmer Church of Christ.

Gilmer was a supporting congregation for Camp Deer Run, and even though there weren't many kids there, many of the members were strong advocates for Camp. Two of those couples were John and Lucille Spencer and Bill and Virginia Dean, who also left behind a generational legacy of Deer Runners.

"They go back further than we do, and they were passionate about it. And that kind of passion just spreads, so when things needed to get done, they would just work together and find ways to do it," Marcie remembers.

These couples and others would often go out to Camp – for church retreats, for workdays, or any time that they could find a way to be of service. DeWayne was an electrical engineer by trade, and a very handy man who was eager to help, and Karen was an idea machine, always thinking of ways to improve and promote the Camp. Together they quickly became champions for the mission.

When that first summer in Gilmer rolled around, they sent Marcie for her first session as a camper. A few years later, her brother Lonnie followed suit.

"I definitely fell in love right from the start," Marcie told us. "I think instead of specific memories, I've got people's names bouncing around in my head,

you know? You're always going to say you remember things like outcamping and the camper staff ball games, but mostly I remember the people."

That first summer sparked a lifelong love of Camp Deer Run for Marcie, so when she graduated high school, she had no other plans but to join the summer staff. She worked the summers of '92 and '93, spending a lot of time working with PeeWees alongside Rebecca Dean Smith and, one session, sharing the old Women's 1 cabin with fellow staff member Robin Bowers Fincher and about 17 Cheukawaka girls.

"You could barely move in that cabin. But we had more fun with that than anything," Marcie said. "They were crazy. That session, Robin and I got pretty close!"

After those two summers on Staff, Marcie did what we all must do eventually, and moved on to the real world beyond Camp. But God gave her a little Camp Deer Run wink when her first job interview as a teacher was with Greg Evans, the husband of Gail (Roberts) Evans, one of Marcie's favorite staff members from her camper years.

"I may have been the only applicant – not many people want to teach 8th Grade Math. But I still like to say that Camp got me the job."

Around this time, DeWayne and Karen joined the Camp Deer Run Board of Directors. They had been so involved over the years that they felt like they could support Camp in a new way by helping to bring new ideas and make decisions. Karen was particularly passionate about supporting the PeeWee program, which was on the verge of being canceled.

In the summer of 1999, Camp needed a PeeWee Mama. Marcie, with her summers off as a teacher and some experience wrangling PeeWees in the not too distant past, got the call. She woke up every morning that summer and drove out to Deer Run to keep the PeeWee

"I don't remember a lot of specifics, but I remember a lot of specific people and the connections I had with them."

program running. But she wasn't making that drive alone!

This is where Kaylie joins the picture. At 4 years old, she wasn't technically of PeeWee age yet, but she tagged along all summer while her Mama worked as the PeeWee Mama.

"I got to go every single day of every single PeeWee session that summer, and I just remember it being the best summer ever," Kaylie remembers. "Even by the end, I could not wait to get back to Camp and do the same craft for the sixth time. Everything was so exciting!"

Marcie's recollection is similar.

"She loved people, so she was just in heaven. She liked to stay very busy and see all the

people and do all the things. She probably thought she was the PeeWee Mama some weeks."

After that summer, Marcie passed the PeeWee Mama baton, and after a few more years, DeWayne stepped down from the Board – he was more of a do-er and was happy to let Karen be the organizer and planner the Board needed. But with Karen remaining on the Board and Kaylie in her camper years, the Browns stayed closely connected to Camp Deer Run.

Just like her mom before her, once Kaylie began her overnight camping years, the connection and love for Camp was instantaneous.

"I just remember falling in love with it. I felt so comfortable. I felt like I had a hundred built in friends; I learned a lot; I was all in on all of the games," Kaylie said. "I don't remember a lot of specifics, but I remember a lot of specific people and the connections I had with them."

With almost twenty years between Marcie's first summer overnight camping in 1984 and Kaylie's first in 2003, many things about Camp had changed. While Marcie remembered being one of only 12 total campers in an entire session, Kaylie never attended a session with less than 150 campers. In Kaylie's Deer Run experience, there were more

kids, more staff, more buildings, and more paint on the rec hall, but through all the years and all the change, at least one thing remained the same—the meaningful relationships formed at Camp.

“When you come back year after year with the same people, and you live all over the place, but you get to connect there, those end up being the strongest friendships, not the people you see for the other 50 weeks of the year,” Kaylie explained. “You just can’t wait to get back to that place with those people, and I know never wanted to leave!”

For Marcie, it was special to see Kaylie making those Camp connections. It was even more special when she saw Kaylie camping – and eventually working – alongside many of her own Camp friends’ kids.

“I know I keep talking about the connections, but I just loved seeing her make connections with some of my people, and also making her own new connections,” Marcie said. “I’ve always felt like the relationships that she built at Camp are just so much stronger and more of a blessing than the relationships that she built sitting in church or at school.”

Those relationships turned out to be critical for Kaylie as she worked through some of the more difficult parts of growing up.

“Growing up, I had some insecurities around the fact that my dad wasn’t present. I can remember lying to people

when they would ask where he was. I would say, oh, he’s not with us anymore,” she explained. “At Camp Deer Run, I could break down the walls, and I didn’t have to build this perfect picture of who I was or what my life was like. I could be my authentic self, and people relate to that, and they encourage you, and they support you and remind you that you don’t have to be a perfect human.”

It’s no surprise that these were the people that she leaned on and trusted. And when Karen Brown passed away unexpectedly in 2011, it was her Camp friends that she turned to.

“Whenever something would happen, it would be my camp friends that I would go to,” she said. “When my grandma died, and we moved back to Gilmer during my senior year, everything was different, and I saw my mom hurting. And it was our church and our Camp people that were there supporting us, and that helped us get us through really hard times.”

And while the Camp friendships helped sustain Kaylie through the loss of her grandma, it was Karen’s passion for Camp that colored many of their memories of her.

“It was just where her heart was, and where her service was, and where her passion was, even if she never was a camper or on staff,” Marcie explained. “When she passed away, we actually found a blanket in the back of her car that she had just made, I guess she found some fabric with little deer on it. She had made it for Ty, but she hadn’t been able to give it to him.”

It was a blanket for Ty’s new baby boy, Josiah, so they delivered the blanket to him. When they did, DeWayne also made a request: that Karen could be buried at Camp. It just made sense she should be in the place she had loved and served for so many years, and that her whole family had loved and served. It was the place where her daughter found much needed Christian friends and young adult mentors, when their small-town church had very few. It was where her family bonded together through service on workdays when Camp was just hanging by a thread, totally dependent on families like theirs to keep it alive. It was where she watched her husband baptize her granddaughter. It was her mission field, and it was the mission field she passed on to the rest of her family.

So up on the top of the hill, you’ll find a headstone for Karen Brown, inscribed with words befitting her life of service from Isaiah 6:8: “Here I am! Send me.”

Since then, the Brown family has continued in their passion and service for Camp Deer Run. From 2014 to 2018, Marcie put her free summers to good use, and again returned to work summers at Deer Run, but this time serving campers in the kitchen. But she wasn’t just there to help in the kitchen, she was also getting a front row seat to watch Kaylie serving on the Summer Staff. Kaylie worked two summers on staff, 2013-2014, before inheriting her mom’s old title of PeeWee Mama for her third and final summer at Deer Run in 2015.

Today, Marcie is still teaching, living with DeWayne in Gilmer, and, in Kaylie’s words, “reminding him that he just had back surgery and shouldn’t be up on the roof.” DeWayne continues to support Camp. He and Karen are

among a select few whose support has never wavered over the last 40 years – members of the Rafter’s Project long before there was ever a name for it. Kaylie and her husband Zach live in the DFW area and are also Rafter’s Project members, keeping the legacy alive and well.

“Even though I’m a little farther away now and we don’t get to visit as much, it’s probably the most special place on earth for me and my family,” Kaylie concluded. “It’s the most important mission for all of us that we choose to support and always will. I believe that’s exactly what God wants us to do, who he wants us to be.”



member spotlight

JASON GRAHAM served on the Deer Run staff from 2007-2011, as a counselor and group leader. He and his wife, Rachel, met at Camp and now have three beautiful children! The Grahams are Rafter's Project members, and Jason also serves on the Camp Deer Run Advisory Council.

What is your background with Camp Deer Run?

I grew up attending Lamar Avenue church of Christ in Paris, Texas and lots of other kids went to Camp. I went as a camper for the first time in 1999 and I loved it so much I was able to go back a second time in the same summer! I camped almost every summer until I was old enough to be on staff and I worked from 2007-2011.

Why do you think Camp Deer Run is important?

Camp is important for exactly what I mentioned above. I think it is a place where people grow in their knowledge of God. It is a training ground for his servants while still being a place of incredible fun!

Do you have a favorite Camp memory?

I have literally hundreds of wonderful memories from Camp Deer Run, both as a camper and staff member. It's too hard to narrow it down, but I can honestly say that Camp is where I felt my faith becoming my own. I personally fell in love with my Lord and Savior and I have Camp to thank for that.

What is something God taught you through Camp Deer Run?

God used Camp to teach me how to be a better servant. I have a long way to go, but as both a camper and staff member, you have many opportunities to be self-sacrificial, and that attitude is fostered there.

What made you decide to become a monthly donor?

My family gives because we believe in the mission of Camp Deer Run and we want others to have the chance to experience God there like we have!

How is Camp Deer Run relevant to your life today?

Camp is becoming relevant in a new way for me as my kids will start camping now. My oldest daughter will have her first camping experience this summer and we are very excited..





pray with us

PLEASE CUT THIS PRAYER LIST OUT AND PLACE IT SOMEWHERE YOU'LL SEE IT OFTEN
AND BE REMINDED TO **PRAY FOR CAMP!**



Thanksgiving

2025 SUMMER STAFF

We have officially completed our Summer Staff hiring for this summer! We are so grateful for the 110+ young men and women who applied, and we're grateful for God's guidance and provision in selecting 65 of those applicants to serve at Camp Deer Run this summer. Join us in thanking God for these special young people!

END OF YEAR FUNDRAISING

At the end of 2024, we set out to raise \$120,000 for several projects focused on embracing the FUN of Camp Deer Run, like repairs to the Swing, a shade for the Pool, new lights and a giant fan for the pavilion, and more. God provided more than we could've hoped through the generosity of the Deer Run family, and we raised over \$300,000, more than double our goal. Praise God!

SUMMER CAMP REGISTRATION

At the time of printing, there are 1,198 campers registered for Overnight Camp this summer! That's AMAZING! We are so thankful for our campers and their families and the opportunity to serve them this summer.

Petitions

SAFE AND FUN SUMMER

The summer is rapidly approaching! As always, we are praying for a safe, fun, and impactful summer for all of our campers and Staff. We pray that God would protect them all from sickness and injury during their time at Camp, as they experience the joy of Lord in their activities, friends, and worship.

STAFF DEVELOPMENT

We are so blessed to have hired an incredible group of young people to serve on our staff. We believe God has called each of them to this mission and chosen them for a purpose. Our challenge and prayer is now to build up, encourage, and train these young men and women to support them in fulfilling that calling this summer. Please lift up our Summer Staff in prayer, that God would prepare them for the good works he has planned, and fill them with His Spirit.

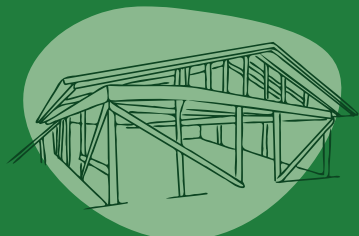
LIFE-CHANGING IMPACT

Our greatest prayer is that God would use Camp Deer Run this summer to bring thousands of people closer to Him. For those who know Him, to come to know Him better and be inspired toward a Spirit-led life. For those who don't, to see Him in a new, real, and life-changing way that will inspire a lifelong devotion to the gospel of Jesus Christ. We pray this for every camper, Summer Staff member, visitor, alumni, and family that we interact with this summer.

Camp Deer Run

1227 CR 4590

Winnsboro, TX 75494



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