

Delaware State Police honor those who've given to Camp Barnes

Date Published:
July 10, 2015

By Maria Counts
Staff Reporter



Coastal Point • Maria Counts: Harry and Linda Kent of Millville were honored by the Delaware State Police for their dedication to improving the conditions at Camp Barnes over the past four years, as well as contributing new mattresses to the camp. Members of the community and the Delaware State Police gathered together last week to honor those who donate their time and money in support of Camp Barnes.

The summer camp is an overnight residential camp run by the Delaware State Police and is open to children between the ages of 10 and 13 at no cost to the camper or their family. Camp Barnes accommodates 60 campers per week for six weeks. The camp is in session from early July through August. All children are eligible to attend, regardless of family income.

"In 1947, the Delaware Association of Chiefs' of Police accepted the challenge to undertake a project to combat juvenile delinquency in the state of Delaware. The committee's resulting recommendation led to the establishment of Camp Barnes, for the recreation of deserving youth from throughout the state," said DSP Superintendent Col. Nathaniel McQueen Jr.

"Camp Barnes was originally designed to provide children who are unable to attend summer camps an opportunity to experience life at a summer youth camp. Camp Barnes remains basically unchanged — providing Delaware children with outdoor experience for over 60 years.

"In 1948, only 40 campers were able to attend Camp Barnes — today we have over 1,000 students a year that appear here at Camp Barnes to enjoy the camp, and several groups that use the camp throughout the summer."

The camp was named for Col. Herbert A. Barnes, who was the superintendent of the Delaware State Police at the time of its inception, and is considered to have played a "pivotal role" in establishing Camp Barnes at the time.

"Francis DuPont, who was on the state Highway Commission, when dad told him what he wanted to do, they got \$35,000 to start this camp. And the Chiefs of Police Association gave \$10,000 to start this camp," said Herbert Barnes Jr., one of the honorees last week, whose father created the camp. "Dad signed a lease for 99 years, at \$1 a year, with the State, for the 13 acres this camp is built on."

Camp Barnes summer camp creates adventure-based outdoor learning experiences for campers who may not have the opportunity to enjoy the activities outside of camp. Some of the many activities campers participate in throughout the week include swimming in an Olympic-size pool, kayaking in Miller's Creek, arts and crafts, nature walks, and talent shows. Campers can also enjoy a scaled down version of the Olympics and state police demonstrations by the K-9 unit.

"I've got a special place in my heart for the camp. The kids who come here come from everywhere. It's a melting pot for the state of Delaware. Kids from the inner-city of Wilmington come, and we have kids from Gumboro. They come together for one week and become one — they become a family down here," said Cpl. Shawn Hatfield, the camp's director.

"A lot of the kids that come to this camp, they don't go to Rehoboth Beach for the weekend, they don't go to Myrtle Beach, they don't go to Disney World. This is their vacation. This one week is a vacation that a lot of these kids remember for the rest of their lives."

"To see the smiles on the kids' faces, a lot of the kids don't eat like we eat here... We eat very well here. A lot of these kids probably don't get to eat how they eat here. To see them leave on Friday, with the girls in tears because they don't want to leave, brings a smile to my face, brings a smile to the counselors' faces."

McQueen said the camp is limited in funding, and although it receives funding from the General Assembly every year, other donations are critical to keeping the camp operational.

"I don't think a week goes by when I'm at headquarters that I don't receive a check from somebody who wants to donate to Camp Barnes. Some people, every year without fail, will send a check — whether it's for \$50 or \$100 — to help run and maintain Camp Barnes."

Atlantic Concrete was thanked for their donation of approximately 52 yards, or six truckloads, of concrete for the camp's basketball court, and in 2014 also donated concrete for the walkway leading to the camp's flagpole. The business also sponsors the camp's annual stock-car race fundraiser.

Atlantic Community Thrift Shop has donated \$15,000 over the last year and a half, which helped complete projects, and donated furniture that's being used at the camp.

Bruce and Sharon Schoonover were honored for their efforts in overseeing the renovation of the camp's bathhouses, funded by the Fenwick Island Lions Club, of which both are members and of which Bruce Schoonover serves as president.

"Both have given a great deal of time and effort to the bathhouse," said Sgt. Richard Bratz, director of public information for DSP. "They volunteer their time and wisdom without fanfare, and are individuals who give back to their community because they think it is the right thing to do."

The Fenwick Island Lions Club was also honored for their donation to renovate the camp's bathhouses before the 2015 camp season started.

"This is such a special place to the entire state of Delaware and its residents," said Bruce Schoonover. "The Fenwick Island Lions Club took great pleasure in working with Camp Barnes in doing the renovation of the bathhouse. We're proud to be just a very small part of the Camp Barnes family. I can't say enough about the generosity of the Delaware State Police... It just makes such a difference in so many people's lives. Here's to another 68 years."

Harry and Linda Kent of Millville were also honored for volunteering many hours of their time over the last four years, as well as their contribution of new mattresses for the camp when it was "in dire need of new ones." The Kents are also active members of the Millville Volunteers.

Barnes was honored for giving to the camp through volunteer hours, as well as his financial support.

"He gives a lot of his time to the camp. He brings popcorn to the campers each week and makes the Camp Barnes calendar each year," said Bratz. "It is great knowing the Barnes name is still involved in the camp and that Mr. Barnes takes great pride in the camp his father helped start."

Barnes said the camp has been life-changing for some of the campers.

"One thing I remember my father saying: There was a boy who came to the camp one time for two weeks. His family were alcoholics. The next camp period, he ran away from home and they found him down at camp," said Barnes. "Dad told one of the troopers to bring him up to headquarters. And my father told the boy, 'If you don't run away from home anymore, you can stay all next summer at the camp and help the cooks,' and the boy never ran away again."

Jimmy Hitchens was thanked for his involvement in the stock-car race fundraiser, from which the kids benefit. The Kent County Levy Court has also donated to a number of projects over the last few years, including the construction of a handicapped ramp for the pool in 2012, and purchased brand-new kayaks for the camp in 2014.

The Matt Haley Companies' Global Delaware Fund donated funds for the renovation of the camp's pool. Donations from the Sussex County Council over last three years helped with construction of handicapped ramp for the pool and the purchase of new kayaks for the camp.

WSFS was honored for their help in cleaning up the camp, as well as their support of projects that benefit the camp's youth. Schagrin Gas was honored for purchasing a handicapped chair lift for the camp's pool. Millville by the Sea was honored for their "huge presence" at cleanup day and their financial support of the camp.

The Millville Volunteers, who were the first group to jump in and get involved with the camp, in 2010, were honored for their volunteer efforts and financial support.

"They are outstanding friends to the camp, and the impact they have made has been truly remarkable. They have adopted the camp as their own, and the youth of Delaware have benefitted. We know we can always count on the Millville Volunteers when we need help," said Bratz.

The Quiet Resorts Charitable Foundation was honored for their 2010 donation of \$6,000.

"This generous donation was able to help with several projects at the camp, and helped jumpstart renovations at Camp Barnes that continue today," said Bratz.

"Our mission is to help those in need, and that need is a broadly defined word for us. I think Camp Barnes is critical to helping kids in potential trouble. We try to help kids in all aspects of their lives," said Steve Alexander, president of the QRCF, which also offers college scholarships to graduating high-school seniors.

Camp Barnes has a staff of 12 counselors, two cooks, one kitchen assistant and a nurse. Counselors are required to submit to a criminal background check, as well as an interview. There is also a state trooper on the grounds at all times when the camp is in session.

"It's really about the kids at the end of the day. I think the one thing we create with the children is hope," said McQueen. "It's really about the community coming together, with government, with police, with all of our stakeholders in the community, with all of our elected officials, to make this camp run.

"This camp has been here a long time. I remember talking to Mr. Schoonover when he came to donate a large contribution to really renovate the bathrooms here at Camp Barnes. He said, 'The thing that really made me want to donate is the kids.'

"He sees how much fun these kids have here every year, and he wanted to do something to help. We all realize sometimes that kids need help, but you guys have actually taken the opportunity to do something about it and contribute to Camp Barnes... Your efforts do make a difference in the lives of these children, and it takes a community to do that."

During the event, the camp was in session, so donors could see the impact their donations made.

Camper Ben Turk of Hockessin, 13, was attending Camp Barnes for the first time that week.

"I heard about it from one of my friends, and they said it was pretty fun. So I signed up, and it's a lot of fun," he said.

Turk said that he enjoyed kayaking, crabbing and playing in the pool, but the most fun so far was sleeping. He added that he made lots of friends and would love to return to camp.

Camp counselor Whitney Savoy of Bear was working at the camp for her seventh year.

"The counselors don't come here for the money. They could work at the beach, they could work at Grotto's and make a lot more money than they do here, but they have the love of kids and the conviction to help these kids," said Hatfield.

Savoy learned about the camp from her father, a state trooper, but was encouraged to apply to be a counselor by her school resource officer.

"He said he thought I would be good for the position here. So I applied in 2009 and got the job. Every single year I've loved it so much, I've always wanted to come back."

Savoy, who just finished graduate school and plans to become a teacher, said she returns year after year for the kids.

"I honestly love the kids and interacting with the kids. It's a very special camp. I feel like the kids and the counselors are a tight-knit group. We're a family here, and it's awesome seeing the kids grow up every year, because they keep coming back.

"This is my second home. I just love it... I don't know how to explain it, actually. I just love what we do here for the kids. It's really touching when kids look up to you and remember you every single year... It's just the greatest feeling in the world."

Hatfield said that being a part of Camp Barnes has allowed him to see first-hand the positive impact it has on Delaware's youth.

"I just want everyone to know what I know and see for the six weeks that I'm here — that Camp Barnes is making a huge impact on the lives of the kids of the state of Delaware. With you and the past help you've given us, with the future coming. It'll help us get to 2047, and more kids will be impacted by what we do," he said of the many donations and other forms of support made to the camp. "It's the proudest thing I've done since I've been involved with the state police... Being involved with Camp Barnes has really made my career a fulfilling thing."

Hatfield said that he was extremely appreciative of the community support, which will help keep the camp a thriving haven for the children of Delaware in future years.

"Camp Barnes was established in 1947, and my goal is to make sure it's still here in 2047. With the fine organizations that are here, the donors, the civic groups that help either through money or manpower, we're going to make that goal a reality," he said.

"Mr. Schoonover said it best one day when we were walking around, that Camp Barnes is a hidden jewel in the state of Delaware, and we want to get the word out about it so other groups like yourselves can help us get to 2047."

To learn more about Camp Barnes, or to make a contribution of time or money, visit www.campbarnes.net, email James.Hatfield@state.de.us or call (302) 841-3368.