



CAMP MASON Message

YMCA Camp Ralph S. Mason

Fall 2009

A Summer to Remember

There are many ways in which we can measure the success of a summer season. By the standard statistical measures, the 2009 summer was one of many challenges. Enrollment in all programs dipped from 2008 levels; we served fewer campers and families than we would have liked. And, of course, low enrollment creates its own set of financial challenges.

The causes of this decline are varied, but certainly, the current economic woes affected our enrollment. Simply put, fewer families opted to send children to camp this summer.

But statistics only tell a part of the story. The true measures of a summer season are much less quantifiable . . . and yet much more important.

There was a *spirit* at Camp Mason this summer that was palpable and contagious. Apache cabins (our younger girls) skipping across camp while singing loudly and enthusiastically. End-of-session candlelight ceremonies filled with equal measures of joy and sadness. Day campers cheering at the daily awarding of the *spirit stick*. Adventure Bound trekkers returning to camp after a week on the river with an obvious sense of pride and accomplishment.

No, there's not a reliable way to accurately measure the number of new friends made, or skills learned or lifelong memories created. But these are the true indicators of success at summer camp. And by that yardstick, Camp Mason's 2009 summer season was overwhelmingly successful!



YMCA Camp Ralph S. Mason - The Mason Message

The **Mason Message** is published twice a year by YMCA Camp Ralph S. Mason to share news and events with our camp families, alumni, staff, volunteers, neighbors, supporters and all who believe in and share our YMCA youth development mission!

THE ANNUAL FUND: Every Child Deserves a Camp Mason Experience

Every fall Camp Mason launches its annual fund campaign. Contributions to the fund help to provide camp experiences for deserving children as well as general support for programs and operations.

For the 2009 summer, more than 30 children attended camp with some degree of financial assistance. In total, more than \$35,000 was allocated. Still, the need for campership support exceeded the amount of funds available. For 2010, we want to ensure that no boy or girl is denied a Camp Mason summer experience because of the inability to pay.

Won't you help by making a tax-deductible gift to the Camp Mason Annual Fund? As you can read elsewhere in this newsletter, a camp experience can be an important and formative one – an experience that gives a child lifelong memories and the tools to be successful in many future endeavors.

But don't just take our word for it! These comments came from our parent evaluations: *He loves the cabin and his teammates. I find he comes home more considerate and thoughtful. [She] made new friends, helped her mature and grow within herself and taught her responsibility and other valuable life lessons which reinforced what we teach our kids here at home.*

My son had never been away from home for that long and it taught him self-confidence, self-reliance and independence. He can do anything he wants to do when he puts his mind to it.

Please help us to provide a Camp Mason experience to even more kids next summer. A remittance envelope is enclosed with this newsletter.



MISSION

Through the transforming experience of outdoor camping – rich in bonding friendships, physical activity and fun – YMCA Camp Mason will lead youth, families and community to an awareness of our core traditions: environmental stewardship, spirituality and respect for our fellow man.

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www.CampMason.org

Camp Mason is a 501(c) 3 non-profit corporation. All contributions are fully tax deductible and go to program, facilities and scholarships that benefit the children directly.

Camp Mason through all and any of its programs serves all children and families on a first-come, first-serve basis, without regard to race, religion, sex, national origin, economic situation or physical challenge. Families in need of financial assistance should contact the camp office for help and information.

SAVE THE DATE: 2010 Annual Meeting

On Thursday, January 14th, Camp Mason's volunteers, staff and friends will gather at the Nassau Club in Princeton for our annual meeting and dinner. The event is a wonderful opportunity to celebrate the many successes of the year past as well as a chance to hear about plans for the 2010 camping season.

Invitations will be mailed in late November – all members of the Camp Mason community are encouraged to attend. You can also find R.S.V.P. cards on the camp website.

Mark your calendars now and join us on January 14th to celebrate Camp Mason's 110th year of providing rewarding and fun camping experiences for children.



Trustees, staff and LT's at camp this summer

CHECK OUT OUR PERSONAL PAGES

As a component of our annual fund, a number of Camp Mason trustees and key staff have developed their own personal pages. Each solicitor will use their personal page to share their belief in (and affiliation with) Camp Mason.

A personal page is a webpage that provides key information about an individual and why he or she is raising funds for a cause or institution. The page also provides important links to other web addresses and allows a donor to make a secure online contribution.

You can see the personal pages of our board and staff by visiting www.campmason.org.

From the President of the Board - By Tom Mason

The weather is changing ... There's a crisp feeling of autumn in the air. The change in the seasons gives us pause to look back at the accomplishments and fun of the past six months and to look forward to what lies ahead.

Camp Mason's summer season finished in late August. Written evaluations tell us that the bold and exciting changes in program design were embraced and enjoyed by campers and appreciated by their parents. The staff was outstanding . . . the best in years. Campers enjoyed activities on "campus" as well as on surrounding trails and rivers. Our weekend all-camp theme programs were an enormous success. Even those few rainy days offered the chance to huddle up with cabin-mates to invent indoor fun despite the weather.

We welcomed many new first-time campers to Mason, and from the number of early sign-ups we've received for the 2010 season, it appears that many plan to return again and again! So for those who haven't secured your bunk yet, don't miss the chance to see your new friends next summer . . . start planning for camp now!

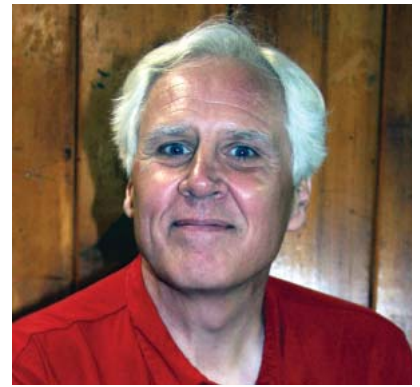
And don't forget about all the events and programs scheduled throughout the fall, winter and spring that you can be part of and stay in contact with the Camp Mason Family.

October 16 – 18 is **Fall Foliage Weekend Family Camp** . . . the perfect time to experience the natural beauty of the woods at Mason.

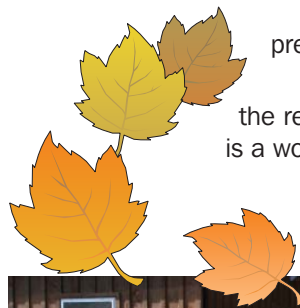
November 6 – 8 is **Volunteer Work Weekend**. Join us for a day or the entire weekend. You will be surprised at how much fun it is to be part of this group of friends lending a hand, a hammer, a brush, or a broom to many important projects around camp. Bring your family and friends . . . we provide all meals, cabins and activities as well.

January 14, 2010 - Don't forget the Annual Board of Trustees' Meeting at the Nassau Club in Princeton. The night includes a sumptuous buffet dinner, a chance to meet and mingle with staff members and the Board of Trustees and a program of speakers and awards. Mark the date on your calendar and become an active part of our growing Camp Mason Family at this inspiring event.

Finally - let's all be **Mindful of Mason** throughout the year. Keep camp in your thoughts as you go back to school, return to work, and go about your daily lives. How can YOU help us improve programs, facilities, and functions? We always welcome your suggestions, and continue to seek volunteers for committees and outside professional advice. Perhaps that's you?



Lend a Hand at our Fall Work Weekend



Join us on November 6-8 for our fall volunteer work weekend. We'll take on a variety of projects to help us prepare camp for the winter ahead, as well as a number of other tasks to improve our facilities and grounds.

In return for your service, we'll house you, feed you and provide opportunities for our volunteers to enjoy all the recreational activities that Camp Mason has to offer. And best of all – the weekend is entirely free! Autumn is a wonderful time to visit camp and enjoy the fellowship and ambience.

You may sign up online for our work weekend or print out a registration form and either fax or mail it in. If you prefer that we send you a paper registration, please call or email the camp office.



Summer Reminiscences

by Camp Director Don Jennings

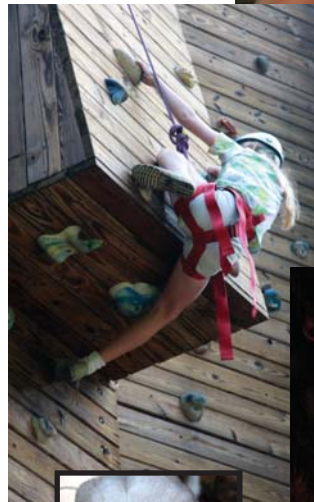
One day this summer I was walking from the dining hall toward the Algonquin Rec Lodge when I noticed a small boy crouched down on the hill between the flag pole and the lake. He caught my eye because he was as still as a stone, squatting low and staring intently down at the ground. I slowed and finally stopped, watching him from the dirt road for perhaps ninety seconds. He never moved once during that time, and I sat down on the grass to see if anything would happen next. Campers ran past him, and excited shouts broke across the lawn as cabin-mates ran to their villages for siesta, but the little boy never moved. After about 3 minutes had passed I decided to walk over and see if he was alright. Just before I got to my feet the boy leapt into the air and ran a zigzag back across the grass toward Algonquin Village, laughing all the way. At this point I was laughing, too – his stillness had seriously captured my attention, but his joy was infectious.

Before I'd noticed the boy, my mind had been running ahead of me and thinking of things that needed to be done that afternoon. In truth, although my body was exiting the dining hall, my head was already at my desk. That young camper's stillness – and his leap – reminded me that no matter how busy the summer seemed, the real value could be found in the moments in-between.

I thought about that boy throughout the rest of the summer. There were many such moments, experienced by campers from many different places. We should be proud of our camp. It welcomes and is home to a passionate array of kids and campers and families and friends who believe, as we do, that camp makes a difference.

A number of former campers and staff have been in contact with me over the last year. All of them speak of Camp Mason as having changed their lives. Many were interested in returning to camp, either as staff members or during an alumni or work gathering. This loyalty to our special place, as well as their willingness to work hard to support it, speaks volumes to the enduring nature of camp.

Still, there is much work to be done. We need your help to keep Camp Mason strong. Whether through giving, or volunteering, joining the Parent Focus Group, or becoming an Ambassador to Camp, every little bit you do to sustain us is a tribute to the effect this wonderful place has had on your life. Please take the time to consider how you might support Camp Mason, and by extension all of the campers, staff members, and families who have called this place their summertime home for more than 100 years.



From the Executive Director by Dave DeLuca

The most recent issue of *Camping* (the American Camp Association's bi-monthly magazine) included an article entitled "Building Pillars of Hope." It detailed three important concepts that every camp should focus on as it develops its program. I was struck by just how closely these concepts mesh with Camp Mason's mission and goals.

The first pillar was **"intimacy with nature."** Our spectacular property facilitates this each and every day. Our summer campers and year-round guests are witness to the glories of nature – a soaring hawk, a cloud's reflection in the still lake, a sunset over the Kittatinny Ridge. Activities immerse our visitors in the world around them. Our proximity to the Delaware Water Gap and its 70,000 acres of protected lands certainly affords even more extensive opportunities for immersion in the natural world.

"Authentic human connections" was identified as the second pillar. Our focus on the cabin group – the family unit at camp – helps young people to develop a wide range of life skills that will better equip them for success as adults. These include leadership, conflict resolution, teamwork and empathy. Many of our outdoor education schools cite the development of stronger social bonds (achieved by having students and teachers live together at camp) as one of the key factors that keeps them coming back to our outdoor center.

Pillar number three was **"human-powered activities."** I chuckled when I read this, for I've often regarded with subtle disdain those camping organizations that cite such offerings as "daily field trips to water parks and professional baseball games" as key components of their programs. Not only did the article emphasize the need to encourage the creativity of staff and campers in devising activities (in essence, the lost art of making your own fun), but it also used the term *human-powered* to describe those activities that required exercise and thus encouraged physical fitness. Camp Mason's varied activities – sports, dance, hiking, boating and horseback riding, to name a few – most definitely encourage physical activity.

So, in recap: check, check and check! Camp Mason is providing our campers with the ACA's recommended three pillars – building blocks to better equip young people with the skills for success in all aspects of their lives.

But then again, we already knew that.



Capital Improvements at Camp

Camp Mason has been located at its current site since 1958 – with a number of buildings dating back to that inaugural summer. With more than thirty buildings and 600 acres of property, there's no shortage of projects for our maintenance team to take on.

This year – with the help of the noted contractors – we've accomplished the following:

- Polished the concrete floor in the dining hall (*thanks to Concrete Polishing Reflections*)
- Added 160 new chairs to the dining hall
- Replaced all the dining hall lighting (*work done by CJ Electric*)
- Added two new hot buffet carts to our food service operation
- Made major repairs to our swimming pool (*with gratitude to Aquatic Services*)
- Enhanced the landscaping outside the dining hall
- Painted both horse barns and preserved the climbing tower (*done by JJJ Martin*)
- Renovated the camp office bathroom (*McClain Contracting*)
- Replaced furnaces in three cabins (*thank you Hart & Iliff*)

We've got a long list of potential renovation projects as well as plans for other site & facility improvements. If you'd like to learn more about these projects – and how you can help – please contact Dave DeLuca at the camp office.



ALUMNI CORNER

Camp director Don Jennings recently invited our summer campers and alumni to share their remembrances of camp for the current issue of the Moose News (our camp newspaper). The response was overwhelming – so much so that we've decided to share some excerpts here:

Lori Murray attended camp in the 1970's:

I still remember my first day at Camp Mason. I was 11 years old and my mom signed me up for a two-week session because everyone in the Metuchen/Edison area went to camp. I did not want to go to camp at all! There was no way I was going to camp!

My mother packed my sister and me up and off we went. I walked into my cabin and being the last to arrive, I ended up with the cot in the middle of the room. Great! There was one girl in the cabin from my neighborhood but we were not friends. We didn't even like each other. Her mother told her to be nice to me and vice versa. No way was this going to happen!

My mother left me sitting on my cot crying. It was awful! Most of the girls in my cabin knew each other and I was clearly the outsider. They had been coming to camp for a few years. I was introduced to a job chart and learned that I had to be a waiter – not to mention the fact that I had to clean the bathroom and sweep the cabin. All I wanted to do was go home. I was introduced to “bug juice” and some “gross” camp songs. I still know all the words to “every Tuesday night my baby vomits in my ear!”

By the end of the two-week session I cried because I wanted to stay! The girl from my neighborhood turned out to be my best friend for years to come! The following year I went to camp for 4 weeks, then 8 weeks. I did the CIT program, was a junior counselor and then a full counselor.

I have great memories of camp. I still tell friends and co-workers that my summers at camp were by far the best summers of my life!

From Kenya Peters (2009 CIT):

Living in England, where summer camps aren't common, I always get asked the same questions: “What do you do at camp?” and “Is it like the camp in *The Parent Trap*?” Answering these questions is the most difficult thing ever. I could explain a day, from flag in the morning to cabin chat in the evening, but I wouldn't be explaining what camp is all about and why people from all over the world, including myself, love it so much! Because it's not the activities that make Camp Mason so special, it's the memories you make and the lifelong friends you hold in your heart. When remembering camp I tend not to think about what I had for breakfast, but the laughter we shared at the dining table. It's the community of both campers and counselors having fun on a daily basis. Having been both a camper and a counselor in training I feel that I have been able to experience camp from two different angles. As a camper I could act in a way which allowed me to be the best person I could be without fears of being judged or labeled. As a CIT I was able to have just as much fun, but I was given the opportunity to learn how to be a great counselor and apply it when I was in cabins with campers as an acting counselor! I learnt so much from this experience. I was able to spend time with kids with a variety of personalities and see how kids who

described themselves as ‘shy and quiet’ at home and school, coming out of their shells and being the most energetic kids on camp.

Being able to experience the things I have at camp, making the friends and memories I have made, and knowing that I have been a part of other people's experiences is something I could never regret or doubt as being the best thing I have ever done in my life!

Chrissy McCabe was a more recent Mason camper:

Camp Mason has been a part of my family since the mid-1970's when my mom was a counselor, and it has been a part of my life since I could barely walk. As a child I was always excited to go to the alumni reunions, no matter how freezing it was in the cabins in late fall. I always remember coming to camp to pick up my older sister during the weekends, and not being able to wait till I was finally old enough to go myself. I first started going to Camp Mason as a camper in 2002 and fell in love with everything about it. The activities, the people, the smell of the Apache cabins (in a good way), and the adventure trips. My parents use to make me take at least four of the trips while I was at camp, because it was one of the special things that Camp Mason has to offer. But some years I would take morning and afternoon trips all week, instead of activities.

My counselors were always great. One of my favorite parts about camp was the overnights. Everyone was loving and just fun to be around. I returned to camp year after year, for six summers... even though there were way too many mornings of french toast sticks and never enough sloppy joes. And in those six years I had many wonderful experiences and made many of my closest friends that have changed my life for good.



Alumni Weekend a Success!



On May 1-3, more than 80 camp alumni gathered for a reunion weekend at camp. They experienced beautiful weather, good food, fun activities and – most importantly – the opportunity to reconnect with old friends. The genesis of the event was an initiative by Graham Spencer and Scott Connor to gather other staff alumni of their generation. After some discussion with Dave DeLuca, the decision was made to throw the net a bit wider and make the gathering a true Camp Mason Alumni Reunion. Graham and Scott are to be thanked for the efforts they made to recruit participants and make the event successful.

Among other activities, attendees canoed, did archery, summited the climbing wall and tried out the high ropes course. A highlight of the weekend was Saturday evening's campfire. A raffle generated more than \$1,000 for the camp's scholarship fund.

As Graham Spencer wrote afterwards:

It was a fantastic experience for me and for many others. All thoughts of the real world – jobs, bills, responsibilities – were cast aside for a couple of days. Everyone got into the spirit of the occasion. While we can't go back and relive summer camp exactly how it was for us, every feeling we had – from the game of knockout on the basketball court as everyone arrived, to the fire tower hike where we caught up on life stories, to the campfire, to that sad feeling on the final morning as we said our goodbyes and camp emptied out, was as authentic as it was back in the day. I can't wait to do it all again.

And we **will** do it again. Please save the dates of **October 8-11, 2010** for our next Camp Mason Alumni Reunion! And, until then, watch for our promotional events to be held this fall and winter throughout New Jersey and eastern Pennsylvania. They're a great way for our alumni to enjoy a healthy dose of that Camp Mason spirit!



In Passing

We note with sadness the July 14th passing of Jean H. Mason. The widow of Ralph S. Mason, Jean was 83 years old at the time of her death. A memorial service was held on August 1st at the Hopewell Presbyterian Church. Those in attendance were reminded of Jean's love of daffodils, music, collecting seashells on Sanibel Island, Florida and her family. Her three children – Karen, Tom and Rip – all spoke at the service and lovingly remembered their mother. Additionally, Jean's brother Tim Harris, daughter-in-law Emily Vickers and family friend Carolyn Yoder shared their fond memories. Gifts in Jean's memory have been designated for Camp Mason. We thank the following for their gifts:

Francis Catania
Cecilia & Michael Coyle
Dorothy Fullam
The Hermes Group L.L.P.
(Ronald J. Sacco & Jeffrey D. DuFour)
The Hun School of Princeton
(Jonathan Brougham)
Dick & Peggy Joyner
Regan Kenyon

Donna & Mike Line
Mary T. Makarski
The Estate of Jean H. Mason
Karen Mason
Mason, Griffin & Pierson
(Valerie L. Howe)
Dr. Carolyn E. Massad
Thomas Moore
Thomas & Barbara Reeder

Elizabeth M. Sanford
Edwin W. Schmierer, III
Dorothy T. Silvester
Susan & Gordon Spencer
Camille Vickers & Greg Beechler
Georgia P. Vickers
Edwin W. Wislar



We were saddened to learn of the passing of Elizabeth (Kane) Rawicz and her son Seth as the result of injuries sustained in an automobile accident on September 20th. Scott Rawicz, Liz's husband, was also injured in the accident. Scott and Liz were both Camp Mason alumni. A private graveside service was held in South Brunswick on September 27th. A memorial fund in Seth's name has been created. Contributions – with notation "In memory of Seth Rawicz" – may be sent to Holt International, P.O. Box 2880, 1195 City View, Eugene, OR 97402.

Our sympathies go out to Scott and to the extended Rawicz and Kane families.

WOULD YOU LIKE TO RECEIVE THE MASON MESSAGE VIA EMAIL?

In an attempt to conserve paper (and save money) we'd like to make the Mason Message available to you via email. Starting with our Spring 2010 issue, we'll email you the newsletter as a pdf document.

Just email Laurie DeLuca at laurie@campmason.org so that we can ensure that we have your current email address – it's that simple. Your email will help us to save time and money and allow us to redirect these resources to other important tasks.

PROGRAM SPOTLIGHT

Family Camp: Make Camp Mason Your Stay-cation

Did you know that Camp Mason offers a variety of family weekends throughout the year? This year more than sixty families spent a weekend together enjoying our beautiful outdoor environment and fun activities, On Labor Day Weekend the weather cooperated providing sunny 75 degree days while families fished, made apple cider, baked apples or just sat on their cabin porches and relaxed. Many families return year after year, making a weekend a regular event on their calendar. Indeed most return with additional family and friends. In these tight economic times, families can enjoy the affordability of an all-inclusive weekend at camp, with packages including lodging, meals and activities.

Family weekends are available in all four seasons, including winter weekend camp, fall family camp, and Memorial Day and Labor Day Weekends. A variety of seasonal activities are available for certain camps, such as horseback riding for Labor Day, rafting on the Delaware at Memorial Day, cross-country skiing and sledding in winter snow, and fall foliage hikes in October. Camp Mason offers a wide variety of evening programs as well, from traditional campfires with songs and s'mores to live animal shows and night hikes. For more information please visit our website. 2010 dates will be released in November.



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