

News Journal, The (Wilmington, DE)

February 26, 2008

**Camp Barnes to celebrate 60 years of summer adventures for kids**

Author: ROBIN BROWN

Author: Staff

Edition: Final

Section: LOCAL

Page: B1

Estimated printed pages: 3

Article Text:

By ROBIN BROWN

The News Journal

Along a gently winding Sussex County road, soft and natural scenery ends abruptly as police signs forbid access to all but the authorized. Another sign identifies Camp Barnes and cannons flank its drive.

But beyond that foreboding entrance is a special spot for kids, a place to learn, grow, bond and make memories.

Run by the Delaware State Police, the adventure-themed camp of close to 100 acres marks its 60th anniversary of youth programs this year. Its Olympic-size pool, kayaking, arts and crafts, nature and skill programs -- and plenty of campfires -- keep kids busy.

The camp, located in the state's southeast corner, was developed by the Delaware Association of Chiefs of Police and active and former law enforcement and corrections personnel, in an effort to address the issue of juvenile delinquency after World War II.

The nonprofit camp -- at first only for children too poor to afford residential summer programs -- is named for Col.

Herbert Barnes, then state police superintendent, and dedicated to all who helped create and sustain the camp.

What surprises parents, said Camp Barnes Director Master Cpl. Randy Ramirez, "is that it's free."

Tax-deductible donations from the law enforcement community and public, volunteer labor and services done at cost let police avoid fees, he said. Benefits held to defray costs include annual stock car races, a motorcycle run and a golf tournament. "We always need help," he said.

Any parent can apply to send a 10- to 13-year-old for a week, but space -- mainly filled on a first-come, first-served basis -- goes fast after March 1, when forms are available at all state police troops, he said. From early July through August, one-week camps serve 60 kids each, staffed by 12 counselors and three dining hall workers. State police staff the grounds at all times for security.

Police say the site is not haunted by a murder victim, although campers would argue the point. By legend, the ghost is a woman named Maggie, buried under one of the concrete cabins, but Ramirez said, "It's just a scary story, I promise."

The tale has been passed on to generations of campers, who also come via the city of Wilmington and groups such as Special Olympics Delaware and the state-run Stockley Center near Georgetown. The camp, where non-police sessions may have fees to cover costs, has a special tie to the 4-H Club.

That federally sponsored youth program has two weeks of camp totaling about 200 campers and staff yearly, said state 4-H leader Joy Sparks, who was a camper in the 1960s.

"The camp is a phenomenal asset," she said. "It's had a tremendous impact on thousands of children's lives."

Retired state 4-H leader Sam Gwinn of Newark, who had come from West Virginia help Delaware's club leadership, worked with Barnes to develop the camp and obtain the land, Sparks said.

"That's how 4-H was involved from the very beginning," she said, and the club has a camp alumni association.

A reunion is planned for Aug. 23 to coincide not only with the camp's 60th anniversary, but the anniversary of 4-H'ers from around Delaware coming to the camp for the first time.

"We're planning some special celebrations," Sparks said. "It wasn't the Hilton Hotel, but it is a great place to have special experiences."

Copyright (c) The News Journal. All rights reserved. Reproduced with the permission of Gannett Co., Inc. by NewsBank, inc.

Record Number: **wil21874771**