

## Summer Camp Happenings



SUMMER 2019 was Rising Treetops' 114th summer of providing summer services at our camp in Oakhurst, New Jersey. As in 2018, we offered 8 sessions for children, young adults and adults with special needs. The total attendance for summer 2019 was 339 overnight and 72 day campers, only the second time total summer attendance has been over 400.

New in summer 2019 were a popular archery activity (with "soft" arrows), a new large chicken coop (we presently have three egg-laying Silkie chickens) built on the edge of the woods between the Health Center and Pines Cabin and a fully renovated Billy's Bunkhouse cabin. For the third straight summer, we offered a 13-day Young Adults Session for clients ages 23-35. Also, to continue to help accommodate families looking for more camp days for campers with autism, in 2019 we continued to provide four five-day autism sessions.

Our campers and their families have weighed in on their experiences with Rising Treetops' 2019 Summer Camp. In an online survey emailed to families and independent adult clients this fall, 56 participants completed the survey. The results reported 98% of caregivers rating their overall experience with our summer camp services as excellent or very good — up from 89% a year ago and 74% from the first online survey of two years ago. The survey

also reports campers' experiences with peers (94% very positive or positive), with staff (98% very positive or positive) and with activities (94% very positive or positive), all improvements over the previous survey (see the President & Executive Director's Column for quotes about the summer camp from families from the survey).

Thank you to our great staff and families for a terrific summer. Summer 2019 brought us staff from the United States and from all over the world, from Australia, Austria, England, Jamaica, Kenya, Poland, Russia, Scotland, South Africa and Turkey. A true melting pot of caring, creative and spirited staff.

## A Client Story



MATT is a 24 year-old Rising Treetops' client who currently resides in Monmouth County, New Jersey, and is diagnosed with Down syndrome and autism. Matt has one older and one younger sibling and both his parents work. Matt attended Harbor School in Eatontown, New Jersey, day programs at Ladacin Network, and currently is in a day program at Children's Center of Monmouth County.

When Matt aged out of Camp Moore in northern New Jersey, his parents found Rising Treetops, not knowing at the time that a special needs camp and respite services were practically in their backyard. In February 2017 they applied for services for summer camp 2017. Matt attended

two August 2017 autism sessions and then returned in November for a week-long overnight respite session. In 2018 and 2019 Matt has attended 13 camp and respite sessions.

His parents, Michelle and Vincent, said their biggest challenge in finding services for Matt has been his being mostly non-verbal. Since Rising Treetops has trained staff with experience navigating communication with non-verbal clients, we were able to quickly understand and meet Matt's needs. After aging out of Camp Moore, it was important to the family to find another camp or respite program for Matt to attend so that they could also spend more time with their two other children.

When the family first visited Rising Treetops in 2017, Matt was immediately drawn to our indoor/outdoor pool. His parents said since he attended his first session that summer, he can't get the smile off his face when he knows he is going back to Rising Treetops. In fact, when his parents pick him up at the end of a session at Rising Treetops, he does not want to leave and it takes some time for him to say goodbye before he is ready to depart.

His parents' busy life makes it difficult for them to organize and supervise engaging activities for Matt, and Rising Treetops provides those for him. In addition to the pool, he loves the music activity and the independence he experiences while at Rising Treetops. We are so happy to have Matt now as a regular smiling part of our family at Rising Treetops!

## From Cheshire to Oakhurst

ROBYN LONYON first came to Rising Treetops from Cheshire, England in summer 2015 as a lifeguard and counselor. She grew up in Cheshire, England, located 30 miles from both Liverpool and Manchester, both in northwest England. Robyn found Rising Treetops through Camp America and their summer staff recruiting fair in Manchester in early 2015.

Robyn grew up with an aunt with cerebral palsy and from age 16 until age 20 worked at the Royal School for the Deaf. Robyn had been a swimming teacher at the Royal School and knew when she went to the Camp America recruiting fair that she wanted to work in an American special needs camp. Robyn was in college at the University of Darby at the time.

After two summers as a lifeguard and counselor, Robyn took an internship in Austria in summer 2017, but

returned to Rising Treetops in 2018 as the Assistant Summer Director, and flourished in her role supervising the cabin supervisors and specialists, and organizing events and therapeutic recreational activities. Robyn says she really enjoyed the position and used her experience as a lifeguard and counselor to be an effective supervisor and administrator. Robyn returned in January and April 2019 and worked respite sessions as a counselor. When Robyn completed her Masters dissertation at the University of Darby earlier than expected in July 2019, she contacted Rising Treetops about available summer positions and assumed the role as an office assistant for the final 7 weeks of the summer.

When the year-round Program Coordinator position became available in fall 2019, Robyn applied and was hired. She began work in November 2019. Robyn believes that her open mindedness and the diplomatic skills she has in life are a result of working with clients at Rising Treetops. We are all pleased to have Robyn at Rising Treetops!

## Summer Party



RISING TREETOPS held its 14th annual "Send a Kid to Camp" summer party on Saturday, June 29th at the home of Melissa and John Bonello in Fair Haven, New Jersey. The evening was a great success, with 100 people in attendance and over \$70,000 donated to Rising Treetops.

During the event, guests had other opportunities to support Rising Treetops, including purchasing raffle tickets for the annual Shore Friends of Rising Treetops raffle and donating to our Cabin Porches Beautification Project. The goal of the Cabin Porches Project is to raise \$10,000 in total to improve our 10 cabin porches by installing built-in benches, purchasing accessible tables, purchasing and installing a safe, seat-belted two-person bench swing on

each porch, and to finish the concrete floors with epoxy floor paint. While all the porches were fully renovated several years ago, they were never appointed with any seating or tables.

Thanks to the generosity of our supporters during the event we were able to raise \$2,000 toward the Cabin Porches Project and we are still raising funds toward the project. If you are interested in donating, please call us at 212-533-4020, email [donate@risingtreetops.org](mailto:donate@risingtreetops.org) or donate at [www.risingtreetops.org/donate](http://www.risingtreetops.org/donate).

Board members Aimee Frankel, Krista Long and Andrew Marrus provided heartfelt remarks about their reasons for supporting Rising Treetops. All other new and local members of the board were also recognized for their commitment to the organization. Thank you to the Bonellos for hosting and to all involved in the event for their generosity and support, and to this year's local business sponsors: New Jersey Natural Gas, Ansell Grimm & Aaron, Anderson Campanella Architects, Atlantic Surgical Group, Automatic Door Systems, Bob Jensen Plumbing and Heating, Monmouth Medical Center, Monmouth University, Red Bank Veterinary Hospital and Two Rivers Animal Hospital.

## Volunteers



IN 2019 Rising Treetops has had many volunteers help with projects at the camp or assist in activities with clients. This fall, of note, we had a local boy scout install a permanent wheelchair accessible archery course, with an extension of the wooden boardwalk in woods through our nature trail. In addition, the annual Monmouth University Big Event volunteer day brought us 8 students to help clean both indoors and outdoors throughout the camp. Thank you to all our volunteers in 2019 for your commitment and time supporting our mission.

## Theater Benefit



THIS YEAR'S ANNUAL THEATER BENEFIT was held on October 30th, beginning with cocktails and dinner at Feinstein's/54 Below. Afterward, guests went upstairs to Studio 54, where they enjoyed a performance of the new Broadway play "The Sound Inside", featuring Mary-Louise Parker and Will Hochman. It was a wonderful evening, and we raised \$135,000 in support of Rising Treetops. We would like to thank all who supported the event for their generosity.

## Thirty-Three Years of Respite!

THE 33RD YEAR of providing year-round respite services at Rising Treetops is off to a great start. From late September through early June we have scheduled 35 respite sessions for children and adults over 158 days. We will serve children and adults with physical and developmental disabilities and those on the autism spectrum.

Each overnight session typically has a party, theme or trip. This fall we have had an end-of-the-season Tropical Week Pool Party, an Indiana Jones Treasure Hunt, an All Hallow's Eve Celebration and a Back to the Farm week.

Year-round respite provides a much-needed break for caregivers, and also a healthy, joyful experience for all clients still living with family and independent adult clients.

## From the Desks of the President and Executive Director



2019 has been an exciting year at Rising Treetops. The year-round services provided to children and adults with special needs continue to be in high demand, with the growth of autism services leading the way, and our emergency respite and after school programs making a real difference in people's lives.

In addition to the client featured in this newsletter, this year we will again serve nearly 500 children and adult clients in more than 1,100 client visits in our overnight and day respite and summer camp programs.

Our commitment is to provide the very best experience possible for our clients and their families. We continued to make significant improvements to our facilities in 2019. We fully renovated our old Maples Cabin, renaming it Billy's Bunkhouse after our long-time board member William Potter. Billy's Bunkhouse now has a new roof, new floors and a fully-renovated tiled, barrier-free accessible bathroom.

As of this newsletter printing, we are replacing all of the siding on our 25 year-old two-story 9,000 square foot Peter's Gymnasium, and, because a storm caused a large tree to fall and demolish our old maintenance shed, we have built a new modern pole barn providing a new workshop and storage facility for the camp.

We have had significant growth in social media, internet and e-communications contacts, resulting in growth in client applications and attendance, and overall increased visibility for the organization. We now have over 7,000 Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube and e-news followers and subscribers. We invite you to follow us!

Since adopting a Strategic Plan as a guide five years ago, we have made significant improvements in the quality of our services and facilities (see the Summer Happenings article about our latest family survey). Also providing evidence of the impact of our work are the recent caregiver comments from our summer camp survey:

**"Rising Treetops has changed our family's life — our son has an absolute blast and we get the respite we need, knowing he is in the best of hands."**

**"We know that having our daughter attend the summer camp program has boosted her confidence in her ability to function more independently."**

**"My son was well taken care of. The staff was accessible. The other campers were friendly and age appropriate. My son has had an excellent experience at Rising Treetops at Oakhurst."**

**"My son spoke highly of the pool, nature walks, and especially the drama class. He had fun, fun, fun!"**

These comments remind us of why Rising Treetops at Oakhurst is so impactful. Thirty-two percent of our revenues come from donations, so we, and our campers who require scholarships, thank you for supporting the important work we do.

We wish you a healthy and happy holiday season.

**Marilyn Friedman, President**  
**Robert Pacenza, Executive Director**



Inspiring confidence and joy  
in those with special needs

For more information, please contact:

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