

Agreement will send 1,000 more kids to camp

For many children with disabilities and illnesses, the highlight of their year is when they are able to spend a week or two at Camp Twin Lakes in Rutledge, Ga.

And now, Camp Twin Lakes is nearly doubling its pleasure.

The organization has entered into an agreement with the state to upgrade the facilities at Camp Will-A-Way located inside Fort Yargo State Park. This will permit the Camp Twin Lakes organization to serve 1,000 more children this year and up to 1,600 more children next year.

Eric Robbins, executive director of Camp Twin Lakes, said the organization knew it wanted to expand its camp services to more children with disabilities.

Camp Twin Lakes had acquired an extra 200 acres next to its 300-acre site in Rutledge. To have developed that property, it probably would have cost \$20 million to \$30 million.

But when Robbins discovered Camp Will-A-Way, which had been built for children with disabilities in the 1970s, another option emerged.

"Here was a place that already exists," Robbins said of the state-run camp that had deteriorated over the years. "The state loved the idea. This is a model for them."

Robbins' agreement with the state calls for Camp Twin Lakes to improve the property. It has a five-year lease that can be "renewed any number of times." Because it was an existing facility, Camp Twin Lakes was able to open for business at Will-A-Way earlier this month.

As part of this expansion, Camp Twin

Lakes launched a \$5.25 million capital campaign to upgrade Camp Will-A-Way and make improvements at its original camp.

The Joseph B. Whitehead Foundation provided a \$1.5 million lead gift, which allowed the camp to open up for this summer. The camp is located on 55 acres of the 1,800-acre state park, but the organization's campers can use the entire property.

"We only renovated half of it," Robbins said. "We redid the Med-Lodge and the health center. So far, we have spent \$1.2 million on improvements.

The plan ultimately is to put in \$4 million in Camp Will-A-Way."

When Will-A-Way is totally renovated, Camp Twin Lakes will be able to serve a total of about 2,900 children in the summer and another 3,000 children during the year on weekends.

So far, the organization has raised \$2.3 million of its campaign, which is being co-chaired by retired Cox Newspapers' President **Jay Smith**, and **Dick Anderson**, a retired BellSouth Corp. executive who now runs the Georgia Regional Transportation Authority.

Camp Twin Lakes was founded by **Doug Hertz**, CEO of United Distributors, in 1993. It partners with dozens of organizations to provide camps for children with arthritis, cancer, brain injuries, kidney disorders, heart defects, and a whole host of other special needs.

"Basically, Will-A-Way is a way for us to be able to keep doing what we do," Robbins said. "We are the largest camp of our kind in the country."



Maria Saporta

LIGHT RAIL A MUST, OLENS SAYS.

Light rail is mandatory for metro Atlanta's future, according to **Sam Olens**, chairman of the Atlanta Regional Commission and chairman of the Cobb Commission.

Olens recently spoke to the Rotary Club of Atlanta about the challenges facing the region.

"We need specific investments in light rail," Olens said. "The day that business can thrive without transit is over. And it isn't interstate BRT (Bus Rapid Transit). In my opinion, it's light rail."

Olens wants two light rail services in Cobb, one connecting Kennesaw State University with Atlanta and the other connecting KSU with Perimeter Center.

"If we don't seriously look at light rail, forget about economic development," said Olens, who has announced plans to run for state attorney general.

But Olens focused his comments on the region, saying the recent 27-3 ARC vote to invest \$25 million in federal stimulus funds in MARTA was a sign of how the region has matured. That move received support from exurban commission chairs as well as suburban ones.

By the way, the three votes against allocating the funds to MARTA to prevent drastic service cuts were Sandy Springs Mayor **Eva Galambos**, Canton Mayor **Gene Hobgood**, and **Phillip Beard**, the mayoral representative from Buford in Gwinnett.

That vote has given Olens confidence that the future of leadership in the region is strong.

Olens also advocated for more open communications between metro Atlanta and the rest of the state to reduce the

"anti-Atlanta mentality" that has been part of Georgia for decades.

"We all want the same thing," Olens said, "a better life for our children and grandchildren."

ROTARIAN RECORDS. As incredible as it sounds, Rotary Club of Atlanta member **Bob Watkins** has had a perfect attendance record for 46 years.

Watkins, who worked in the equipment distributing industry, has been attending weekly Rotary meetings for longer than many other Rotarians have been alive.

Other longtime Atlanta Rotarians with perfect attendance: accountant **Steve Neely**, 36 years; **Bob Eskew**, who is retired from Heery International, and **Buster McBurney** of McBurney Corp., each 35 years; **Howell Adams**, retired from Trane Air Conditioning, 34 years; and **Manning Pattillo**, former president of Oglethorpe University; and **Milt Bevington**, a philanthropist and business consultant, each 31 years.

INTERPRETING THE 'HOOCH.

The Chattahoochee Nature Center will open its new Interpretive Center to the public on June 20 — the culmination of a multi-year initiative, according to **Ann Bergstrom**, executive director of the Chattahoochee Nature Center.

"With lots of help and hard work, we raised \$10 million and made a dream a reality," Bergstrom said. "I think you will be excited with what we have managed to accomplish out here in the suburbs."

There also will be hands-on exhibits where children and adults can learn more about the Chattahoochee watershed. Reach Saporta at (404) 736-3612 or maria@saporta.biz.