

Refurbished camp for special kids opens Sunday

BY SUSAN NORMAN

Hundreds of Georgia children dealing with a myriad of personal challenges are coming to Winder this summer to camp at the newly refurbished Will-A-Way campground at Fort Yargo State Park.

Late last year, the Georgia Department of Natural Resources partnered with the Rutledge-based non-profit, Camp Twin Lakes, to totally renovate and manage Yargo's camp for kids with special needs.

The first of two phases of improvements is complete, and the first of this summer's 12 camps starts Sunday.

"Until Saturday, we'll be putting our finishing touches on everything," said Josh Sweat, Camp Will-A-Way director.

The improvements include: upgrading eight of the 16 camper cabins. "We filled in the cracks, repaired all of the damaged wood, painted, redid all of the plumbing and some of the electrical, put in all new lights and plumbing fixtures," said Sweat.

remodeling three staff cabins and turning a fourth into a multipurpose building for indoor activities.

enclosing the arts and crafts building and adding air conditioning to it.

redesigning the old medical lodge to include infirmary space, overnight facilities for doctors and nurses so they are always onsite, an exam room and a pharmacy.

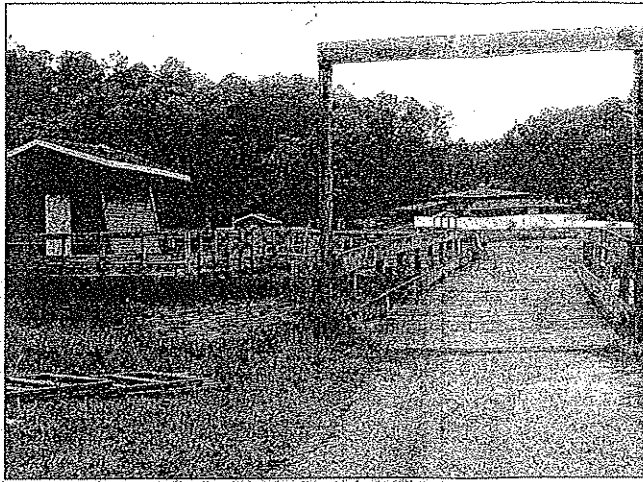
upgrading the dining hall, kitchen and laundry facilities.

improving the campground's lighting, plumbing, sidewalks, communications system and installing a new security system.

adding fully accessible program facilities including a ropes course, climbing tower, and archery and waterfront programs.

"We got all new boats, installed a ropes course and a climbing tower, added an archery range, a bike shop and bikes, and all kinds of sports equipment and games," Sweat said.

Organizations partnering with Camp Twin Lakes have been involved in the renova-



WELCOME TO CAMP

Hundreds of campers are expected to attend a renovated Camp Will-A-Way this summer at Fort Yargo. Camp photos by Jessica Brown

tions, Sweat said.

"It's an opportunity to get a place that caters to their needs and to help get up the infrastructure," he said.

Camp Twin Lakes provides the facilities, programming and staff facilitators, and the partner organizations obtain the campers and volunteers, including volunteer medical specialists and nurses needed for each camp.

"We have a portion we do, and they have a portion they do," Sweat said. "That helps keep the cost low and the experience very unique for each camp."

Private funding for the recent improvements came from an anonymous foundation and from other donors, Sweat said.

"We're definitely excited and love being a part of this community," he added. "The community has reached out and helped a whole lot."

He specifically mentioned the help of Home Depot and also Barrow Regional Medical Center, which donated hospital beds for the camp's medical lodge.

Deputy Chief Russell Wise of Barrow County Fire and Emergency Services also is working closely with Camp Twin Lakes staff to plan for medical emergencies, Sweat said.

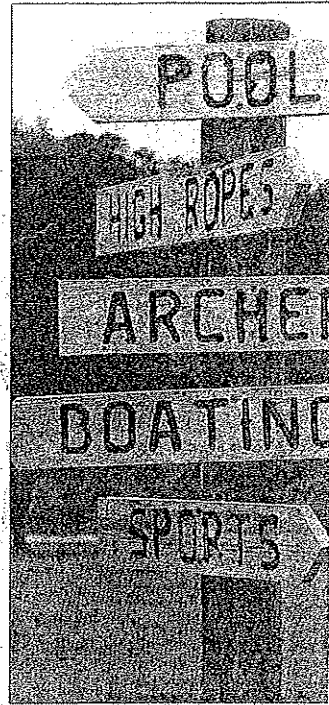


UP AND OVER

An obstacle course awaits campers this summer at Fort Yargo State Park.

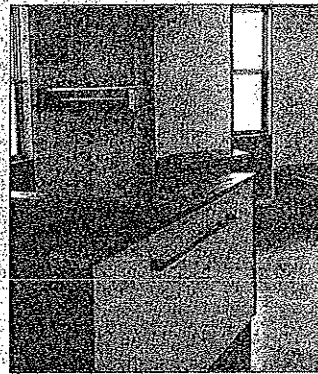
"We will give him information on all the groups we serve and he on a weekly basis is going to do additional training of his staff to help them understand juvenile arthritis or kids with different disabilities that they may not be familiar with, especially in juvenile populations," Sweat said.

For information, go to www.campTwinLakes.org.



RENOVATED CAMP

The Will-A-Way camp at Fort Yargo State is to open. Signs point the way to activities; cabins (below) have also been refurbished.



ACTIVITIES AWAIT

Numerous activities await campers this summer when they arrive at Fort Yargo State Park.



Campers to be honored in Winder parade

Nearly 100 Georgia youngsters who have sustained burns are coming to Winder this weekend for camp and will be honored in a May 27

May 27 Parade Route:

The parade begins at Fort Yargo State Park, turns right onto Hwy. 81, then left at May Street, right

A-Way," White said. "It's just a real good thing for our kids."

The parade is designed to create awareness of burn inju-

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Campers to be honored in Winder parade

Nearly 100 Georgia youngsters who have sustained burns are coming to Winder this weekend for camp and will be featured in a May 27 parade through the city.

The Georgia Firefighters Burn Foundation parade is being held in conjunction with the summer's first camp at Fort Yargo's newly refurbished Will-A-Way campground for kids with special needs.

The parade starts at 10:30 a.m. and will include campers ages 7-17 riding in 20 limousines, plus fire trucks and scores of law-enforcement officers on motorcycles.

"We're hoping we can get a lot of people out for the parade to cheer these kids on," said Lt. Scott Dakin, public information officer for Barrow County Fire and Emergency Services.

The burn foundation is sponsoring both the parade and the five-day camp that starts Sunday.

"Now that Camp Twin Lakes has renovated Will-a-Way, they've added a lot more stuff and teaching opportunities for the kids," said Capt. Cathy White of DeKalb County Fire

May 27 Parade Route:

The parade begins at Fort Yargo State Park, turns right onto Hwy. 81, then left at May Street, right at Horton Street, left at Athens Street, right at McNeal Road, right at Candler Street, left at Marion Street, left at North 5th Avenue, right at Langford Street, which becomes St. Anthony's Drive and then Sims Road, then right at North Broad Street and back to Camp Will-A-Way at Fort Yargo.

& Rescue. She is the director of next week's "Camp Oo-U-La," which is derived from the Cherokee language and means "cool running water" — a reminder of the ideal initial treatment for a burn.

Camp Twin Lakes is providing the facilities and program staff, and the burn foundation is providing more than 100 volunteers, including medical staff, for the five-day camp. The organizations share the costs so the campers participate at no cost to their families.

"This is just a really, really good partnership that I hope extends for some time at Will-

A-Way," White said. "It's just a real good thing for our kids."

The parade is designed to create awareness of burn injuries and prevention.

"A lot of people don't realize that through Alabama, Georgia and South Carolina, we are known as the 'burn belt,'" White said.

"People burn trash and don't think anything about it when they tell an 8- to 10-year-old to attend the fire or they pour gas on it to get it started."

All of next week's campers have sustained burns requiring at least four days in hospital burn units, she said.

Barrow County firefighters in a boot campaign May 7-9 collected \$14,212.50 for the state foundation.

Camp Oo-U-La is the only Georgia camp for children who have survived burns, according to Lt. Ernest Weant, the boot drive coordinator in Barrow County.

"We are honored to have this camp here in Barrow County," he said. "The firefighters are looking forward to working with the foundation in making this camp a success."

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