

## Kids to Camp gets a big boost



**Summer camps.** Waterloo Region Record publisher Paul McCuaig (left), Roman Marinelli, 5, Jasmine Marinelli, 11, Andrew Malcolm, 6, and Jim Hallman pose next to a fireplace at Moose Winooskis to promote the Kids to Camp program. The kids were modelling the program's T-shirts. *Mathew McCarthy/Record staff* Source: *Record staff*  
By Valerie Hill, Record staff

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KITCHENER — In the past three years, 1,000 children have experienced the joy of summer camps thanks to a partnership between the Lyle S. Hallman Foundation and its funding partner, the Waterloo Region Record.

“Both The Record and the foundation made a new three-year commitment,” said Hulene Montgomery, executive director of the Lyle S. Hallman Foundation. “We sent 1,000 kids to camp in the last three years, kids from different backgrounds, to all different kinds of camps. We’re definitely going to be able to send more.”

The Record’s Kids to Camp program launched in 2005 as a way to send children to summer camp, though demand quickly outstripped the supply of funds. In 2008, the program was expanded through a three-year partnership with the Lyle S. Hallman Foundation which matched funds. Montgomery said the program proved so successful, it was recently renewed for another three-year term: The Lyle S. Hallman Foundation increased its support from \$70,000 to \$120,000 over three years and The Record will contribute \$45,000 over three years, possibly increasing that amount through fundraising.

“Together the foundation and paper will contribute a total of \$165,000 over three years to send children from low-income families to camp,” Montgomery said, adding the amount is significant particularly “because of the economic downturn, there are more families in need.”

Corrie-ann Snow knows about need and is a proponent of camp sponsorships.

Every year for the past eight or nine years, the Kitchener single mother has been able to send her three children to Hidden Acres Mennonite Camp near New Hamburg, thanks to the generosity of various sponsors.

“It’s an opportunity to have that time away from the stresses,” said Snow. “They now attend a youth group and look at a positive future.”

While raising her children, Snow also upgraded her education and found a job in social work and while financially her life is better, she will never forget the importance of receiving financial help through the camp’s sponsorship program and community outreach programs.

“I couldn’t have afforded it otherwise,” she said, noting that in camp her children found positive role models, particularly her two sons who don’t have a father in their life.

“The guy counsellors show them a (life) choice,” she said. “It’s not a position of authority, more a mentorship.”

Her oldest son, now 14, and 16-year-old daughter have both taken leadership courses and her daughter has applied to work on camp staff this summer. “She’s not making the choices some of her friends are making.”

Montgomery said that through the camp experience, many youth discover strengths they didn’t know they had. One shy girl, a middle child flanked by two very strong siblings, learned she had a natural gift for leadership at camp.

“By week two, she had gained confidence,” said Montgomery. “She was developing skills and confidence she didn’t have before and took that forward into her school.”

Organizations like Hidden Acres start the process by applying for sponsorships either through the Cambridge & North Dumfries or the Kitchener and Waterloo community foundations which field all applications for the Kids to Camp program.

Montgomery said there are several organizations that apply annually and the list is both long and varied, with both day and overnight camps such as YWCA, Salvation Army, therapeutic riding program camps, a drama camp, community association camps and bereavement group camps, to name a few.

For Snow, having the camp experience for her children gave them “an oasis” away from the stresses of everyday life being raised by a single mother with limited resources.

“It’s so positive and life affirming,” she said.

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