

Elks' Bath County Youth Camp Serves Virginia

BY KATIE DOTSON

Summer Intern

MILLBORO - Starting out as a boys' camp in 1950, the Virginia **Elks** Youth Camp in Bath County now hosts young boys and girls from all over Virginia and is still accepting campers for the next three weeks.

Camp began June 27 and lasts six weeks. The first three weeks have been all girls, which ended Saturday, and boys started camp Sunday. The camp accepts kids ages 8-13 who have been sponsored by their local **Elks** lodges. Ten lodges from different cities join camp at one time for one week, Sunday through Saturday.

Up to eight campers stay in cabins under the supervision of a cabin counselor. The camp has 13 cabins, allowing a maximum of 104 kids to stay each week.

"This is the **Elks**' major project and it serves deserving youth from all over Virginia who will benefit from coming to camp," Camp Director Susie Keller said Wednesday.

Elks pay \$150 for each child to go to camp, and the number of children a lodge can sponsor is based on the membership of that specific lodge. Caretaker Mike Journell explains, "For every 25 members in a lodge, their quota is one kid, but it's up to them if they want to sponsor more."

Virginia **Elks** Youth Camp is located in the mountains on the Cowpasture River between Clifton Forge and Millboro, providing kids with a natural setting and a real camping experience.

"Most of these kids live in the city and have never been in the country," Journell said. "It's a big eye-opener for them to see and be around all this nature."

While at camp, kids take classes from 9-11:30 a.m. Monday through Friday. Classes include arts and crafts, nature awareness, waterfront activities, ropes courses and archery and BBs. Other activities are kickball, softball, dodgeball, campfires with the group, a candy carnival and other events.



Virginia Elks Camp instructor Seth Wright helps camper Michelle Shiflett of Charlottesville shoot a BB gun during camp activities in Bath County. The camp serves Elks Lodges throughout Virginia during the summer. (Katie Dotson Photo)



The Virginia Elks Camp in Bath County provides activities for youth during the summer. Members of the staff include, front row from left, Leigh Ann Reynolds, nurse; Susie Keller, director; Eddie Cross, dining hall steward; Christina Chavarria, counselor; Larami Van Ness, arts/crafts director, and Michael Journell, ranger. Second row, from left, Megan Forbes, counselor; Caleb Haggarty, nature instructor; Lindsay Statler, counselor; LaTronda Cobb, counselor; Emily Proff, counselor; Bonnie Journell, food service manager; Ben Umstead, waterfront director and Joe Sorrell, assistant cook. Third row, from left, Donald Tucker, assistant director; Michael Crawford, program director; Seth Wright, archery/BB instructor and Meg Covnigton, counselor. (Katie Dotson Photo)

Throughout the week, youth also hike to the bluffs and tube down the river and a day is set aside for the special event, the Land Olympics.

Keller explained that the Land Olympics is a fun, competitive event for the kids, similar to a track meet, where winners can receive ribbons.

With these classes, campers gain a basic understanding of each course that meet their individual needs through competitive and noncompetitive situations, informal and structured experiences and activities that contribute to the social and physical development of each camper.

"It's a rewarding experience doing arts and crafts with little children when I feel that they really benefit from it," art instructor Larami Van Ness said.

During the week, the campers are evaluated by their cabin counselors based on progress and performance. Those given high ratings will receive an Outstanding Camper Award certificate at the end of the week during the Awards Ceremony.

From the recipients of the certificates, staff members nominate and vote for Outstanding Camper of the Session. The child who the staff feels has been the best camper will receive a trophy.

Those who are awarded certificates are also eligible to win a trophy for Outstanding Athlete of the Session. To win, a child must show outstanding sportsmanship and athletic skill.

The campers who receive trophies for Outstanding Camper of the Session are voted on at the end of the year by the staff for Camper of the Year. One boy and one girl will receive this honor and be given a special plaque and trophy. They will also have their names placed on the Outstanding Camper Wall in the dining hall.

"While here, kids learn to get along with others, have trust and work on friendships," Keller said. "We strive for them to have great camping experiences."

To learn more about Virginia **Elks** Youth Camp, call 540-862-9489 or e-mail Keller at elksveycdirector@aol.com.