

Deep Creek Lions Hold Annual Blind Campers Program

The Deep Creek Lake Lions Club hosted four blind children and their families from around the state July 6-11 for camping and recreation in the Deep Creek Lake area. The program began on Sunday with Boy Scouts from Troop 49 in Morgantown, W.Va., setting up tents and a campsite at Deep Creek Lake State Park.

"This is the second year we have teamed with Boy Scouts on this program, and it has been a great success for everyone," said Lions Club spokesman and assistant Scoutmaster Chris Nichols. "The Boy Scouts are provided with the opportunity to earn service hours required for advancement while engaging in a fun and rewarding activity, and the Lions Club is furnished with energetic helpers who can engage with the campers on a peer to peer basis. And, of course, the campers all get a better all-around experience, too."

For nearly 30 years, the Deep Creek Lake Lions Club has hosted blind children from throughout Maryland for both summer and winter programs which emphasize personal growth and confidence building through fun activities such as snow skiing and tubing.

During the summer Blind Campers program, members of the Lions Club camp in tents with the blind campers and their families at Deep Creek Lake State Park. Club members donate their time and personal boats to bring the campers out on the water to participate in tubing, water skiing, and cruising the lake.

Local businesses also contribute services and goods for the program, such as go-cart and bumper-car rides, pizza and ice cream, and recreational equipment for the campers to enjoy.

For the past two years, Scouts from Troop 49 have assisted the Lions Club with this program by serving as sighted guides for the campers and by setting up, maintaining, and breaking down the campsite.

Campers arrived on Monday, and were guided in the erection of tents by the Scouts.

"The management and staff of Deep Creek Lake State Park went above and beyond their normal duties to provide a safe and comfortable campsite for the program," said Nichols, "and were especially solicitous and tubing.

after the severe thunderstorm came through the area on Tuesday."

With the camp fully set up, Lions Club members Ken Bush and Rick Schiff arrived at the park with their pontoon boats and provided evening rides on the lake to all. Dinner was eaten at the campsite, with pizza and ice cream donated by Brennenman's Store.

On Tuesday, all awoke to club member Ed King's "famous" rooster call and reveille on the bugle. After a breakfast provided by McDonald's of Oakland, the group spent the day on the lake, with club members Gerry McGinnis, Craig Hunter, and Dan Cullather providing boats and recreational equipment for the day. Bill's Marine Service also donated the rental of a large towable tube called "the banana."

"You can tell by the look on some of the campers' faces that they're not sure how it's all going to work out when we first get them on that tube," said Hunter. "But that first smile you see when the tube gets up to speed makes all of it worthwhile."

After securing the campsite from the impending thun-

derstorm on Tuesday evening, the group proceeded to Whip Resort for dinner with the general membership of the Lions Club to hear about their day. The Boy Scouts, campers, and their families were asked to say a few words to the club about what they had done during the day and what their favorite part was.

Scout Darius Adkins said he was surprised he could have so much fun helping people, and stated it was the best camp he had ever been to.

Families of the campers shared the sentiment, with Joelle Herman, mother of one of the campers, stating that it had been a long time since her entire family had so much fun together.

On Wednesday, the group began the day with more tubing, fishing, and skiing on the lake. They then went to the Whip Resort, where they received complimentary rides on the Mountain Coaster. In the afternoon, the group drove go-carts and bumper-cars, played miniature golf, and ate pizza, all courtesy of Funland.



"GOING BANANAS" ON DEEP CREEK LAKE – The Deep Creek Lake Lions Club recently hosted its annual Blind Camper program. Four blind children from around the state participated, with Boy Scouts from Morgantown, W.Va., serving as sighted guides. Activities included go-cart riding, miniature golfing, and boating on the lake. Above left, campers and Scouts are pulled on an inflatable tube called "the banana" by club member Jerry McGinnis. Left to right are Paxton Marner (Star Scout), Lauren Herman, Darius Adkins (1st Class Scout), Christian Howard, and Brandon Pickrel. Above right, Howard is guided by Star Scout Alex Phares (right) as they hike through Swallow Falls State Park. Below, campers, parents, Scouts, and club members take a



break from boating. In the front, from left, are Herman, Howard, Phares, and Adkins. In the middle row are Marner, Harrison Jones, and Pickrel. In the third row are Connor McGinnis, Craig Hunter, Jillian Herman, and Tommy Wenzel. Standing are Jerry McGinnis, Dan Cullather, and Chris Nichols. See story.



Camper Brandon Pickrel was deemed the star of the climbing wall, easily reaching the top of the easy and medium ascents, and nearly reaching the top of the hardest wall.

"I bet I can make it next year," Pickrel said.

On Thursday morning, the group headed to Swallow Falls and hiked the loop trail, with the Boy Scouts serving as sighted guides over the rocky terrain. Camper Christian Howard, who had been quiet for most of the week, smiled broadly when he first dangled his bare feet into the fast moving waters of the Youngsherry River.

"It feels like a massage on my feet!" Howard said.

After the hike, the campers proceeded home, while the Scouts returned to camp to work on their Monobooting and Lifesaving merit badges. Instructional time was donated by Darcy Huxford in lifesaving techniques and by Brad Frantz, who provided hands-only CPR training with manikins donated by the Property Owners' Association of Deep Creek Lake.

On Friday, the Scouts broke down the campsite and returned home to Morgantown.

The Deep Creek Lake Lions Club holds the Blind Campers program every year, as well as hosting Blind Skiers for three separate weeks in

the winter.

"The Blind Campers program really is a team effort between our club, the state park, local businesses, and now the Boy Scouts," said Nichols. "We're really finding out that more members helps to make the program better and serve more blind children. With the energy and engagement the Scouts bring to this effort, we're hoping to provide this opportunity to even more campers next year."

The club holds numerous fundraisers each year to support these and other programs, including the annual Boat Parade on Deep Creek Lake, Casino Nights at Silver Tree, and an auction of donated boats and recreational equipment. For more information on the club's activities, persons can visit deepcreeklions.org or facebook.com/deepcreeklions.

