

# The Boston Globe

## A legacy of joy at summer camp



ARAM BOGHOSIAN FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE THE BOSTON GLOBE

Josh Shapiro, who has been associated with Camp Grossman for 46 years, played chess with 6-year-olds Kiva Wapinski (left) and Jhani Thomas during an open house at the Newton JCC.

**By Hattie Bernstein** GLOBE CORRESPONDENT MARCH 08, 2017

When the Girl Scout camp catalog arrived in the mail in January, Laurie Magee gathered her three daughters in their Foxborough home, eager to begin the annual ritual of making picks for summer camp.

“I try to get them interested in the sailing program because it’s what I did,” says the mother of Caroline, 14, Bridget, 13, and Audrey, 7.

An alumna of Camp Wind-in-the-Pines in Plymouth, Magee, 47, has yet to find a taker. Instead, her daughters prefer nature, arts, and adventure programs, choices that weren’t offered by the [Girl Scouts of Eastern Massachusetts](#) in the late ’70s and early ’80s when their mother was a camper.

But that doesn’t mean they aren’t thrilled to hike the same trails, sleep in similar platform tents, and enjoy the campfires, flag ceremonies, and other rituals that meant so much to their mom.

“When we went to the open house, it was exciting to me to show them where mom went; to tell them, ‘I ate in that dining hall. I swam in that lake.’ I showed my children the units I stayed in, the tents,” says Magee. “Instantly, it was more familiar, more endearing.”

Legacy camps — where generations attend — are as varied as the interests of the families who choose them. Some, such as [Camp Bauercrest](#) in Amesbury, a sports camp for Jewish boys, are specialized. Others, including [Wind-in-the-Pines](#) and the Jewish Community Centers of Greater Boston’s [Camp Grossman](#) in Westwood, offer everything from boating and swimming to nature and the arts.

What these camps have in common is family tradition. When a boy attends his dad’s sports camp, or a girl spends a week at the same Girl Scout camp as her mother, they share experiences that bring them closer, and extend the bonds of friendship and love.

The Girl Scouts estimate more than a third of campers follow a mother, aunt, or other family member to summer camp. At Camp Bauercrest, roughly 40 percent of the boys are legacy campers. Grossman, which is much newer, is just beginning to see former campers’ children.

“There’s a lot of memories. I have a lot of pride about the camp,” says Lowell resident Bethany Welcome, 37, whose 17-year-old daughter, Molly, will be a second year counselor-in-training this summer at [Camp Runels](#), the Girl Scout camp in Pelham, N.H. Bethany spent summers at the camp from 1989 to 1998, starting as a camper and graduating to CIT and counselor. “I really wanted that experience for my daughter,” she says.

Michael Berkley, 38, of Sharon, says his sons, Matthew, 9 and Eli, 7, are bursting with stories when they get off the bus that delivers them home from Camp Grossman, which their parents attended as kids.

“The kids love the fact that some of the same things they are experiencing, their mom or dad may have also. Things like swimming, boating, nature hikes,” says Berkley, whose sons will be returning to camp for their third season. “I think they get a kick out of knowing that when mom and dad were their age, we were doing the same things.”

When he reflects on his own camp days, Berkley remembers the excitement of the Maccabiah Games, Grossman’s version of the Olympic-type sports competitions. He’s also grateful for a program that fostered Jewish identity and a connection to Israel, and inspired him to become a counselor and program director.

Cyre Feldman, 47, who also lives in Sharon, shares that appreciation. After she enrolled her three kids at Grossman — the oldest is staff this year, the younger two still campers — she went back, too, taking a job as a boating instructor.

“You really have to feel sorry for my husband,” says Feldman, who attended the camp about 40 years ago. “He hangs out at the dinner table, and he’s just lost, the poor guy. He just listens.”

Stuart Silverman, director of camping services for the JCC of Greater Boston, says Camp Grossman, which opened in 1973, is only now beginning to see legacy campers.

“Sixty-five to 70 percent of our counselors were campers,” says Silverman, a retired high school guidance counselor who has been affiliated with Grossman for 40 years. “The ones who left 15, 20 years ago, are having children now.”

Those who now attend reflect a wider swath of the population. “We often get non-Jewish friends of Jewish kids who attend,” said Silverman. “I would say about 5 to 10 percent of the kids who attend Grossman are not Jewish. We see that as a testament to the quality of the camp.”

By contrast, generations of campers who attended Camp Bauercrest, founded in 1931 in Amesbury to get poor Jewish boys off the streets of Beverly, Chelsea, Lawrence, and Lynn, have slept in the same bunks, shared meals in the same dining hall, and sung the same songs, passed down to their children and grandchildren.

Needham resident Mark Smoller, 61, was a first-year camper at Bauercrest in 1965 and a counselor from 1972 until 1977, the year he graduated from college. In 1942, his grandfather, the late William Smoller, joined the board and served as a vice president; his father, the late Seymour “Cy” Smoller, worked as a counselor from 1944 to 1948 and was on the board from 1972 to 1987 when he took an honorary life membership to clear a seat for his son, who for years has been the camp president.

Mark’s son, Billy, 32, the father of 3-year-old Gabe and also a Needham resident, followed his dad to camp; Gabe made his first appearance at Bauercrest when he was 10 months old.

A love of sports and competition connects the generations of Smollers, including cousins and nephews. But what binds them to Camp Bauercrest — and to each other — are the friendships and memories, forged on the ball fields and in the bunks, and nurtured for a lifetime.

“These guys are my brothers,” Mark Smoller says of friends, who like himself, sent their sons to camp. “We travel together, get together socially. Our kids are friends because of camp.”