



From left: Rabbi Jason Miller, Jason Charnas, Carly Leipsitz and Rachel Ruskin.

Photo by Shynna Mandell

## They're Back

**Four Tamarack alumni have returned to their old stomping grounds.**

**Stephanie Steinberg**  
T2T Staff Writer

**T**his is the greatest place on Earth.” That was the response from four adults when asked to describe Tamarack Camps in Ortonville.

Jason Charnas, 31, of West Bloomfield; Rachel Ruskin, 31, of Birmingham; Carly Leipsitz, 27, of Farmington Hills; and Rabbi Jason Miller, 32, of Farmington Hills once roamed Camp Maas as campers and counselors. They journeyed on canoe trips, navigated ropes courses and trekked on hikes through the wilderness.

After a few years of absence, all four have returned as Jewish professionals and were roaming camp again last summer — this time zipping around in golf carts as they performed their daily jobs.

### **JASON CHARNAS**

Jason Charnas was a true Tamarack kid. He worked two summers as staff in Brighton and eight in Ortonville as a teen service staffer, tripper, Camp Kennedy staff member and ropes supervisor. Charnas also interned as Tamarack’s assistant director in 2001.

“I did everything here,” he said.

Yet it was the Western and Alaska trips he went on as a camper that got Charnas hooked on Tamarack.

“My favorite camp memory is watching the sunset on Lake Superior on the last night of my Alaska trip,” Charnas said.

He said the experiences and the friends he made on those trips are the reason he is working at Tamarack today.

In October 2007, Charnas was appointed the director of teen and family programs. His job entails doing what he loves: coordinating the Western and Alaska trips, Camp Kennedy, Agree Outpost, the Bubbie/Zadie program and family camps as well as interviewing staff and supervising directors.

“I manage to keep busy,” Charnas joked.

From 2001-2005, Charnas worked as the assistant director of Camp Lakeland and the youth services coordinator at the JCC in Buffalo, N.Y. He returned to Detroit to coordinate Federation’s 2006 Teen Mission to Israel.

“Every experience helps with what’s coming next,” Charnas said. “Teen Misson helped with working with kids, talking to parents and looking at what parents

want to see in terms of updates with their campers.”

Charnas said planning a trip to Israel taught him how to plan for long-distance trips such as the Western and Alaska.

Charnas’ twin brother, Craig, has worked at Tamarack every summer since he was a teen service staffer (TSS) in 1994.

“Even when I staffed Teen Mission, I would tell Craig how jealous I was he was working here. Being away makes you real-

ize how spectacular Tamarack is,” Jason Charnas said.

But the real reason he returned?

“My love for Tamarack and camp in general,” he said. “Spending a summer here is equal to spending a summer in Israel. You can wear shorts, T-shirts and flip-flops every day. What’s better than that?”

### **RACHEL RUSKIN**

Seeing the smiles on kids’ faces while they have a good time at camp is Rachel Ruskin’s favorite part about her job.

Ruskin was a camper at Brighton in the early 1980s. For the next 15 years, she went on to be a camper, counselor, supervisor and assistant director at Young Judaea, the oldest Zionist youth movement in the United States.

Ruskin also traveled the country in 2002 as the director of Israel Scouts’ Friendship Caravan and Israel Delegation. As director, Ruskin led a caravan of 17 Israelis who sang and danced at JCCs across the country, performing shows with educational messages about Israel.

In November 2005, Ruskin was named assistant director of Camp Maas. She

### **HOW HAS TAMARACK CHANGED SINCE YOU WERE A CAMPER?**

“In some ways it’s the exact same camp. The faces change, but the people are the same. The goals and programs are the same. My perspective has changed from when I was 16 and a TSS [teen service staffer].”

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# Tamarack Camps

## Something for Everyone!



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**Informational Meeting** for parents and campers  
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December 22, 2008  
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Application at [www.tamarackcamps.com](http://www.tamarackcamps.com)  
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### Alumni

**Alumni Family Weekend**  
May 22-24, 2009 at Camp Maas  
Spend a memorable weekend at Camp Maas with your family and friends.

**Alumni Family Fun Day**  
Sunday, June 21, 2009, 10am - 4pm at Camp Maas  
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# Camp Guide

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### WHAT DO YOU HOPE TO ACCOMPLISH?

"I hope I can help Tamarack continue to build a strong, vibrant Jewish community and to provide experiences that will make campers want to be staff here one day so they in turn can provide the same positive experiences to their campers."

interviews and hires staff specialists and counselors, which includes traveling to Israel and England. Ruskin learns a lot about other cultures when traveling outside the U.S. to employ staff.

"When you work overseas with another culture, you take that experience with you," she said.

More than anything, Ruskin values working with kids and spending time outdoors. While she never attended Tamarack as a camper, Tamarack has found a niche in Ruskin's life.

"The more familiar I became with Tamarack, the more I found it was a place where my values are also important values here."

Ruskin said she feels lucky to work at Tamarack. She loves when visitors come to camp and remark what a happy camp it is.

"The summer is the culmination of months and months of hard work, and you see memories being created," said Ruskin. "You know campers are going to go home and have stories to tell for years."

### CARLY LEIPSITZ

"Camp was my life. I was the one crying when I got off the bus to go home," Carly Leipsitz said.

Leipsitz started attending Tamarack at age 7. Over the next 20 years, she attended each summer, first as a camper, then a counselor.

However, Leipsitz took a break from Tamarack and worked at Ripco Real

Estate in Manhattan, N.Y., doing marketing and graphic design. After three years at Ripco, Leipsitz made her way back to Michigan — and Tamarack.

Leipsitz was appointed development associate in June 2007.

In that role, Leipsitz works with the marketing department at Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Detroit and conducts alumni relations. Leipsitz recently coordinated Alumni Family Fun Day at Tamarack and is working on upcoming alumni events in New York and Chicago. The goal of alumni events is to get the alumni connected to Tamarack again.

"I love planning the alumni events and bringing them back to this great place," Leipsitz said. "You hear the excitement, talking with someone who's at Tamarack who hasn't been connected with camp for 10 years."

Leipsitz stresses to alumni that Tamarack is going back to the way it was when they attended as campers.

"I think camp went away for a little bit, and it has really come to this great place that reminds me of when I was here," Leipsitz said. "The same activities like Fox Fire and Israel Day still go on."

Yet Tamarack has changed in some ways. "We didn't have all those toys in the water or the climbing wall when I was here," Leipsitz said with a hint of jealousy.

Like it has for many campers, Tamarack helped form Leipsitz's Jewish identity.

"I was very active in my Hebrew school, but coming to camp I learned to appreciate my Jewish identity," Leipsitz said. "I was a professional in a non-Jewish organization, but coming to work for a Jewish organization is so meaningful, and you understand why you're here."

Leipsitz said working for Tamarack is a dream come true.

"When I worked in New York, I had a job, and now I have a career."

### RABBI JASON MILLER

Rabbi Jason Miller has grown up since his last summer at Tamarack 20 years ago. "I've experienced life, gotten married, had three children, traveled the world and been to Israel nine times. I have learned how to be a teacher and I have also been on a Jewish spiritual journey."

While he may have grown up, Miller fondly recalls the days he was a camper at Brighton from 1983-1986 and Ortonville from 1987-1989.

"I loved camp," Miller said. "I loved

### WHAT WAS YOUR FAVORITE PART ABOUT GOING TO TAMARACK?

"I went to camp every year with three Rachels. It was the three Rachels and Carly. We went through every year of Ortonville here. They were my best friends in the world, and I'm still in touch with them to this day. My friends that are a huge part of my life now I met at camp when I was 10."

playing sports, going on canoe trips and some of the friends I met at camp I am still friends with today.”

Miller even officiated at the wedding of his Brighton bunkmate from that first summer he attended camp at age 7.

Miller noted he has Tamarack to thank for meeting his wife, Elissa. His and Elissa’s family were regulars at family camp at the Butzel Conference Center.

“Twenty years ago, we were both at family camp with our respective families at the same time, having no idea we would later be married,” he said.

Miller earned a degree from James Madison College at Michigan State University prior to attending rabbinical school. He was ordained as a rabbi in 2004 at the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York, where he also received a master’s degree from the William Davidson School of Education.

#### WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE PART ABOUT YOUR JOB?

“The opportunity for one-on-one conversations with campers and staff. Whether it’s sitting under a tree with a 12-year-old practicing for his bar mitzvah or going for a long walk around the lake with a staff member on Shabbat, these opportunities are priceless.”

“When I was in college, I was very involved in the Michigan State Hillel and was also teaching 10 hours a week of Hebrew school,” Miller said. “These experiences — teaching and being a Jewish communal leader — led me to want to be a rabbi and to do that professionally.”

As a camper, Miller had no plans to become a rabbi. “Becoming a rabbi was not on the radar screen at that time,” he admitted. However, some of the leadership qualities he possesses were first formulated as a camper at Tamarack.

Before taking the job as Tamarack’s rabbi on April 1, Miller was the rabbi for two years at Agudas Achim Congregation in Columbus, Ohio.

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# Willoway Day Camp



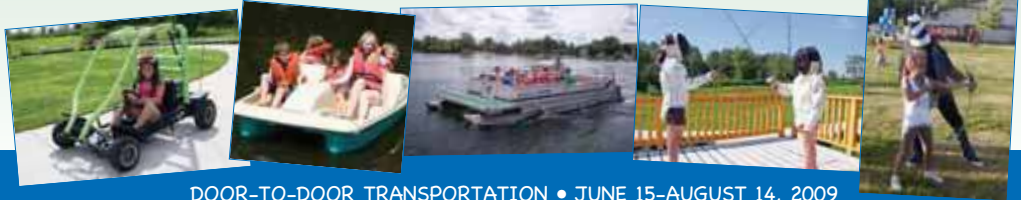
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4-weeks (grade 4-9)	\$4,350	\$3,565
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(\*) The CDN/USD exchange rate has recently fluctuated between \$0.76 & \$0.86



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