

Boosting Tamarack

Patron event kicks off camp's financial aid program.

While Tamarack Camps has assisted families in sending children to camp for over 100 years, a few factors have made 2009 unique.

For the first time in its 107-year history, the Bloomfield Township-based Jewish camping agency will allocate more than \$1 million in financial aid in order to fulfill its mission — never denying a Jewish child the opportunity to attend camp because of financial circumstances.

Its inaugural "Send a Kid to Tamarack" patron event was held at the Bingham Farms home of Doreen Hermelin. The event honored entrepreneur and philanthropist Florine Mark of Farmington Hills and raised \$125,000.

Mark, a Tamarack alumna, needed financial aid at age 11 to make camp a reality.

"We were a big family; my sister was sick and my parents didn't have enough money to send me to camp," said Mark. "I remember feeling so lucky when I found out I could go because Tamarack helped us."

The majority of the event's 175 attendees were once Tamarack campers or staffers.

"One of the special things about our agency is that it has touched so many lives over the last 100-plus years," said Shelley Hutton, Tamarack's board president. "I love meeting new people and hearing about their connections to Tamarack. In many cases, it includes multiple generations."

Roughly one-third of Tamarack's campers receive financial aid each summer, according to Jonah Geller, the agency's executive director. The ratio has increased to one-half in the last few years because of the economy. Geller says sending a child to camp benefits a family in numerous ways, especially these days.

"Most of our financial aid applications include a letter from parents indicating the value of a Jewish camp experience for their children, especially when Jewish day school or a trip to Israel may not be an option," said Geller.

"Many of the letters this year have focused on accommodating a family's basic needs, such as food, medical care, shelter and supervision. A number of parents have informed us that the respite we provide also allows them time to figure out their next step regarding jobs, housing, loans, etc." □

Howard Rosen supports Tamarack by bidding on and winning Tiger tickets donated by the Finding Law Firm, Royal Oak.



Doreen Hermelin, hostess, and Florine Mark, honoree, enjoy the evening while helping children attend Tamarack.

To help "Send a Kid to Tamarack" or to learn about obtaining financial assistance to send your child to camp, call Tamarack's office, (248) 647-1100, send an e-mail message to tamarack@tamarackcamps.com or visit the Web site, www.tamarackcamps.com.

Honoring Volunteers

Friendship Circle recognizes a large group of its friends.



Volunteer leaders Andrew Goldman, 15, of Bloomfield Hills; Max Herczeg, 15, of Farmington Hills; Carson Kane, 16, of West Bloomfield; Noah Zucker, 16, of West Bloomfield; Justin Moss, 17, of West Bloomfield; and Matt Luckoff, 17, of Bloomfield Hills

Levi Stein

Special to the Jewish News

Close to 1,000 people attended the annual Friendship Circle Recognition Event — honoring the 750 dedicated volunteers of the Morrie and Sybil Finkel Volunteer Club.

The West Bloomfield-based Friendship Circle is an organization with a unique approach to helping families of children with special needs. Innovative programming and creative activities are designed to foster a relationship between community teenagers and the children by drawing on the love, boundless energy and dynamism of the teenage population.

The May 6 event began with a Chinese auction in LifeTown, a 23,000-square-foot facility that serves as a therapy and activity center, social meeting place and hub for the network of volunteers, staff and supporters. Following the auction, attendees walked a short distance to the Shul-Chabad Lubavitch for the reception.

Bassie Shemtov, co-founder and director of Friendship Circle, told the volunteers, "Thank you for orchestrating such brilliance! Your dedication, your heart, your unending

ability to give and give has created the most inspirational song and the most amazing example of a united community."

Teenage volunteer Max Herczeg proclaimed to the crowd, "Friendship Circle has taught me hope. Watching children half my age struggling with and overcoming life's toughest challenges has taught me to become more patient, responsible and most importantly a true believer in hope."

In the past year alone, Friendship Circle has opened its doors to 70 schools in Michigan and more than 3,000 families in Metro Detroit. As its impact spreads across the nation, many are still surprised to learn about what started in West Bloomfield. □

Levi Stein is public relations coordinator for the Friendship Circle.

For information on the Friendship Circle, access the Web site at: friendshipcircle.org or call (248) 788-7878.



Avy Schreiber, center, of Southfield, with other singers