



Camp Onseyawa keeps 'em coming back

By MARTIN TOOMBS
Seneca Falls Bureau

OVID — Campers at Camp Onseyawa enjoy themselves so much they just keep coming back and coming back.

Many get so stuck on spending two weeks each August at the camp for the handicapped children, that when they get too old to be campers, they return as counselors.

In fact, about a quarter of the camp's 98 staff members got involved with the camp first as campers. Some have 10 years of involvement, having served two-year stints as "counselors in training" before becoming full staff members.

They work in a variety of posts at the camp, which is home to 145 handicapped youngsters during the Aug. 16-28 encampment at Boy Scout Camp Babcock-Hovey on Seneca Lake.

This is the 26th year for the camp, a fact well known to one camper-turned-counselor, who started the ball rolling for the camp. The camp is sponsored by Rotary Clubs of Ontario, Seneca, Yates and Wayne counties, from which the camp "OnSeYaWa" gets its name.

Gail Hagen was about 10 when she became upset that her twin sister could go to camp and she couldn't. Hagen's father, Walter Reitmarm, looked for camps where Hagen, who has Spina Bifida and walks with crutches, could go. He talked to some friends who were Rotarians, she said, and that led to the first Rotary Handicapped Camp in 1956.

She attended the camp for about five years, Hagen said, but hadn't returned until last year, when she was part of the 25th anniversary celebration. She talked to Don Bogart, the camp's director and

I've been lucky, I have been able to experience the camp on both sides—Eileen Teachout.

ended up on this year's staff.

"I love it," Hagen said, adding that the camp is "Bigger and better than I remember it."

Hagen, a widow who lives in Waterloo and has her own tax preparation business, plans on returning next year.

While she primarily works in the office, Hagen said of the campers it is "fun watching them going through the activities and enjoying themselves."

Eileen Teachout, who lives in Martville, near Fair Haven, is at the camp for her 16th year, seven as camper and nine as a staffer.

"I love the camp," Teachout said. "It's grown immensely; it's much, much bigger," and the programs available have increased.

Teachout, who has brittle-bone disease and uses a wheelchair, was directing traffic in the camp office and commented that it is "still as crazy around here as it ever was."

That craziness is most evident among the counselors, whose antics keep the campers entertained. At lunch Friday, there male counselors were made into a huge banana split by three female counselors. The syrup-dripping counselors weren't too upset; the women were just getting even for an earlier prank.

The 24-hour involvement between the staff and campers leads to attachments which don't occur in other camps. Teachout noted that "people become so

devoted they take time off" from their jobs to come to the camp each summer.

Romances also have begun at the camp. Bonnie and Guy Clark met at the camp and scheduled their marriage a couple summers ago so that it wouldn't conflict with camp. They showed up the first day directly from their honeymoon and are on the staff again this summer.

Bogart noted they give jackets to those counselors with eight years service and there are several of them around.

Among the other camper-turned-counselors is Dawn Proper, a camper for five years before spending two years in training and now four years as counselor. She'll be heading a unit this week.

George Canne, of Phelps, who is deaf, spent six years as a camper, and is marking his 18th year at the camp this summer.

Bogart pointed out three unit leaders are former campers. But even he was surprised when they did a count of the former campers on the staff which turned out to number 25.

Some of the camper-counselors are themselves going to college to become special education teachers.

John Kenney, program director, said of the returned campers, "They are some of the most dedicated staff we have."

A new program has opened more opportunities for the campers to return. A group of waiters has been formed from campers who wanted to return. Their unit also is headed by a former camper who was a unit leader for a girl's unit last year.

Camp Onseyawa serves children with the full range of disabilities, including those confined to wheelchairs, the severely retarded and those with less obvious

problems. They make a camping experience available to other youngsters as well, such as those with diabetes, whose health doesn't prevent them from enjoying camping activities, but which might prevent them from being accepted at other camps.

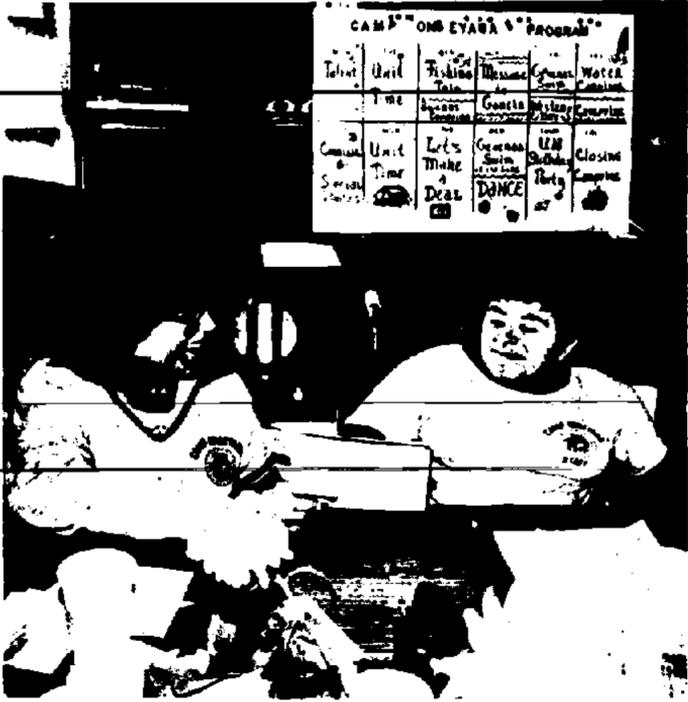
The camp is paid for by the Rotary Clubs of the four counties. Kenney noted the size of the commitment the clubs make, including the cost of feeding the nearly 250 persons at the camp. There are no fees for the campers' families to pay.

Kenney said several staff members are qualified professionals who make their living working with the same disabilities they see at camp. They take their vacation time to work with the kids, Kenney said, for which some receive \$25 pay.

The camp's theory is to allow the campers to participate in camping, Bogart said, even if that means having a blind child shooting, with assistance, on the rifle range. While the campers' safety is protected, the camp provides the range of camping activities. Children in wheelchairs go on hikes, retarded children lead songs, everyone goes swimming and special awards for smiling for those campers who can do little more are all accepted parts of the program.

The acceptance is the most obvious part of what occurs at the camp. As the counselors and campers interact, the campers are treated as children, not as a disability. Activities are based on what the campers can do, and not what they can't.

And the campers' affectionate response to that treatment and the sincere reaction from the counselors, probably is what makes the camp a special experience that both campers and staff want to return to each summer.



Gail Hagen, left, and Eileen Teachout, check over some work in the office at Camp Onseyawa. Many of the campers enjoy themselves so much they return eventually as counselors. Photo by Martin Toombs

Man charged in crash

SENECA FALLS — David R. Brand, 22, of Seneca Falls was charged with DWI, speeding and possession of marijuana following a one-car accident Saturday, the Seneca County Sheriff's Department said. Deputies said Brand was driving a van north on County Route 116 at 4:50 a.m., when he lost control and struck a utility pole. They said the van was extensively damaged and the driver suffered scrapes

to both knees but refused medical treatment.

Brand was charged with driving while intoxicated, unreasonable speed, uninspected vehicle and possession of a small amount of marijuana. He was released in the custody of a family member and is to appear Sept. 7 in Seneca Falls town court, the sheriff's department said.



Castle bounce

Youngsters bounce around an air-filled castle rides and games. Entering this castle was a lot at the Moravia FD-VFW Field Days this easier than the old days. Photo by Steve Taylor weekend. The annual event included parades,

EC orientation set

SENECA FALLS — Or from as far away as The Orientation Committee for the 290 Florida, Colorado, Alaska, Louisiana, among the freshmen and transfer students beginning their foreign countries re-studies at Eisenhower College presented are Korea, Jamaica, Switzerland, Russia, Poland, Bangladesh, Malaysia, Indonesia and Colombia. The new arrivals include 150 freshmen, 26 transfers, 11 Japanese exchange students from Tokai University and more than 100 computer science, photography and engineering students beginning their days, in meetings with studies at Eisenhower faculty advisors, in athletic before going on to the Rochester Institute of Technology campus next with freshmen and transfers will be given a feel for the group comes from New York, there are students

Eisenhower students returning from last year will arrive on campus Sept. 2 for registration. Classes begin Sept. 3; the 14th academic year will officially be called into session in opening convocation ceremonies that evening.

Policy meeting set

SENECA FALLS — An and David Geitner and Vince Caraccio, assistant principals. The session will be held at 7:30 p.m. in the auditorium. Heading the meeting will be Gerald MacLuso, principal

and David Geitner and Vince Caraccio, assistant principals. The session will focus on academic and discipline policies for the 1981-1982 school year.

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