

Mennonite Camping Association

NATURAL LINKS



2018 BI-NATIONAL

Begin making plans now to attend the 2018 Bi-National MCA Gathering at Camp Friedenswald in Cassopolis, Michigan on March 19-22, 2018. Camp Friedenswald is conveniently located 2.5-3 hours from the major airports in both Chicago and Detroit and 1 hour or less from the South Bend, Indiana and Kalamazoo, Michigan airports. Don't miss this great opportunity to reconnect and fellowship together!

CAMP UPDATES

Hidden Acres Mennonite Camp, New Hamburg, ON, www.hiddenacres.ca

by Anna Kuepfer, Environmental Service Coordinator



Donning my Biology lab coat and goggles, I push through the bustling crowd of eager campers, anxiously waiting to sing for their lunchtime mail delivery, and raise my hand in the air. "Ready?" I ask. "One... two... three!" and the crowd of eighty bursts into enthusiastic, barely organized uproar. "Teka's bokashi bin!" they cheer, vaguely to the tune of "Bill Nye the Science Guy". We cover our mouths rapper style and chant Te-ka's bo-kashi-bin in false deep voices before yelling WASTE FREE, WASTE FREE with emphatic fist pumps on every syllable. It's ridiculous.

What began with an offhand comment from Chris at the summer staff Christmas reunion ended with another version of myself, smelling like compost and cheering along with the campers about decaying food waste. Bizarre doesn't even begin to describe it.

2018 RECRUITING

Wednesday, Feb. 7 - EMU
Thursday, Feb. 8 - Bluffton
Friday, Feb. 9 - Goshen
Monday, Feb. 12 - Hesston
Tuesday, Feb. 13 - Tabor
Wednesday, Feb. 14* - Bethel
Thursday, Feb. 15 - McPherson

* February 14 is Ash Wednesday, so there will not be a camp-related chapel that day.

But the campers loved it, compost happened, and food waste stayed out of the dumpster. That's what mattered. Since 1962, Hidden Acres has been a place to find God in nature, and our effort to be advocates for the environment is founded in our faith. Yet, as our green roof flourished, more than 2,000 lbs of food waste ended up in the dumpster every summer. As stewards of creation, it didn't feel right. I was hired as the "Environmental Services Coordinator" to design a functional composting system for the camp, and while my nights were packed with scientific research, planning and troubleshooting, my days were filled with teaching children to care for creation, making food waste fun. Miraculously, they loved it. Chants of "Teka's bokashi bin!" and "WASTE FREE" could be heard nearly constantly (to the staff's chagrin). At the end of designated waste-free lunches, only a few paper napkins would rest in the bottom of our Bokashi compost bin. It was a sweet victory.

FACEBOOK

Join the conversation! "Like" us on Facebook and be part of the community online: "Mennonite Camping Association - MCA" group.

Victories were few and far between. I watched, horrified, as 300 lbs of raw waste poured out of the first experimental compost bin which hadn't had enough microbes added. With soggy month-old macaroni pooling at my feet, I resolved to quit.

I didn't follow through. As I type this, successfully composted food waste rests peacefully in the Hidden Acres gardens, smelling like celery and ready for spring planting. Our system diverted over 1800 lbs of food waste from our dumpster this summer alone. I feel a twinge of nostalgia for the crazy campers who - voluntarily - licked their plates clean to reduce waste. And more than anything, I'm relieved that the macaroni has finally been reduced to crumbly, rich soil. As our system stands, we have four barrels of food waste layered with Bokashi microbes to break down meat, eggs and dairy. Beside it rest two large spinning composters for vegetable scraps. Next week we'll have another fresh batch of compost ready for the garden. It's beautiful. And it's one more step towards living out our faith at Hidden Acres.

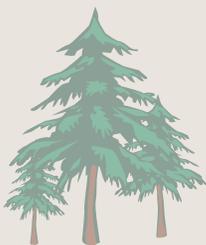
SUMMER STAFF REFLECTIONS

Camp Friedenswald, Cassopolis, MI, www.friedenswald.org

by Kaitlin Abrahams, Summer Staff

I always have the same two initial reactions when I arrive at Camp Friedenswald. The first is a strange feeling of peace and home-ness, even though camp is very far from home. The second is awe. Awe at the trees. I look up and up and up because the trees around my home (Kansas) are dwarfs compared to Friedenswald trees. When the camp pastor, Holly Zehr, had us do the tree pose during morning watch, I couldn't help thinking about how fitting it was because one of my favorite things about camp is the trees. The trees grow, silently and in their place, like guardians of all that camp stands for,

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SUMMER STAFF REFLECTIONS CONT.

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while the campers run about, growing as well but with great noise and no knowledge of the value of stillness. Or at least, not many campers. It is, of course, impossible to generalize about campers as they have as much variety amongst them as the trees in the woods.

by Clara Weybright, Summer Staff

My first week of counseling, I was more than a little intimidated. This is my first summer both working as a counselor and being at Friedenswald. As I sat on the porch of Maple Cabin, waiting for my first high school camper to arrive, I thought, "Wow, a lot of people are trusting me right now - parents, campers, my employers, my co-counselors." Trust. That's the thing I've experienced over and over again - and had to use, myself, quite frequently. This summer, I've learned so many things (most of which are still very unprocessed in my mind), but the one clear theme of the summer is trust. When things went wrong and when things were going perfectly; when there was grief and intense overflowing happiness; when there was conflict and harmony, everybody had to use so much trust.

With this kind of trust, I've realized, comes intense connection and the building of community. At the end of each week, I was amazed by how close I felt with each of my campers, my co-counselors, and camp, in general. This summer has been one of many connections and forming of intense bonds with the people and the place around me. This trust, such incredible trust, has allowed me to feel a part of this camp, even though I've only been here six weeks, and for that I am incredibly grateful.

Cove Valley Youth Camp, Mercersburg, PA, www.covevalleycamp.com

by Jessica Picone, Program Director's Assistant

Overcome. That one simple word describes my summer perfectly. Every day, there were new challenges I faced and every day, God graced me with the abilities to overcome each and every one of those challenges. I had a rough start from the beginning. I had only one year of experience at Cove Valley and I was hired as the female program director's assistant (PDA) about one month before camp started and while I was still focused on tackling my finals. I had never met my fellow PDA and I felt completely overwhelmed and under-prepared for what awaited me. I spent my days juggling my PDA leadership position, my position as an instructor and completing a college summer course. I was stressed and exhausted. And every single day was absolutely worth it! Yes, camp life is tough for a PDA and there just appears to be an endless amount of challenges along the way, but all of it was worth it. The rewards were beautiful! Simple moments like making a shy camper smile or the joyful laugh of a fellow staff member are the moments that truly made up my summer. Those moments of pure joy reminded me why I was so willing in the first place to take on this challenge. I know beyond a shadow of doubt that I spent my summer exactly where God wanted me to be. He was always there with me, every step of the way and it is through my faith in Him that allowed me to overcome. (1 John 5:4)

by C.J. Harrison, Program Director's Assistant

This summer served as a powerful reminder of how God is always in control and can use any situation to draw us closer to Him. One of my favorite examples of this was during Eagles week. The staff had a huge outdoor game planned for the final night, but due to a thunderstorm we needed to call it off shortly after it started. Everyone took shelter in the basement. When it was time for chapel (which was supposed to be outside), we gathered around the basement's fireplace and sang worship songs in the dark. Then the speaker gave the message, and honestly, that night was one of the most powerful chapels I've seen in my five summers working at Cove. Things didn't go even slightly according to our plan, but that didn't stop God from working. Jesus is always faithful, and if we focus on glorifying Him through the problems life throws our way, He will give us exactly what we need to grow stronger in our relationship with Him!

Camp Mennoscah, Murdock, KS, campmennoscah.org

by A 2017 Summer Staffer

Camp has played a huge role in my journey since my first time as a camper nine years ago. Some of the people I've met here are now my closest friends, a second family. This is the first place where I really felt God's presence and the place where I finally believed that Christ loved me. This is because of the love and acceptance that I felt and continue to feel daily here. This authentic Christian community has inspired me and supported me through both high points and low points in my life.

I am so inspired by seeing campers interact with each other throughout the week; whether that be through small acts of kindness to brighten a fellow campers day, having the courage to speak in front of their peers at campfire, praising God in worship, and of course, seeing them develop in their faith and accepting that they are loved by God, no matter what. Camp will always hold a special place in my heart, and I couldn't feel more blessed to call this place my home away from home.



Amigo Centre, Sturgis, MI, summer staff enjoy canoeing on the weekend.