

# Summer Camp:

It's not just  
for kids anymore



Mary Ellen Caster tries her hand at the two-step with Donald "Fletch" Gutilla, 78.



At the end of their stay at Camp Stella Maris, the whole group of senior citizens gathered at the beach to sing songs of yesteryear and toast marshmallows. One person mentioned that it has taken her 75 years to make it to her first campfire.

By Teresa A. Parsons

Maybe the place has become permeated with the joy kids have brought to summer camp for the last 59 years, or maybe the enthusiasm of the staff is infectious. Whatever the cause, Camp Stella Maris was charged with an air of childlike anticipation from June 18 to 20, although not a youngster was in sight.

Instead, 15 senior citizens with youthful hearts packed their sleeping bags, insect repellent and extra socks for a three-day camping vacation at the Conesus Lake site. For the most part, they were an independent group unafraid to try the unknown when they arrived on Tuesday morning at 10 a.m. to move in and get acquainted. And although the camp's program director, Florence "Fluff" Mauro noticed an initial shyness, by Tuesday night nicknames had been bestowed and the campers had become fast friends.

Maureen Woodstra wasn't phased by coming to camp alone to participate in a totally new program. She makes a habit of being unusually independent — in fact, last summer the Greece resident toured 28 states in her Toyota on her own. Originally from England, Woodstra decided that after 30 years in the United States, it was time to see the country, and she didn't waste any more time.

Last month, Woodstra graduated at age 64 from SUNY Brockport with a degree in English and art history after seven years of full- and part-time study. Although she has a few ideas for putting her new degree to use, she seemed to have enjoyed the challenge regardless of her eventual goal.

Several campers had experienced serious health problems, but

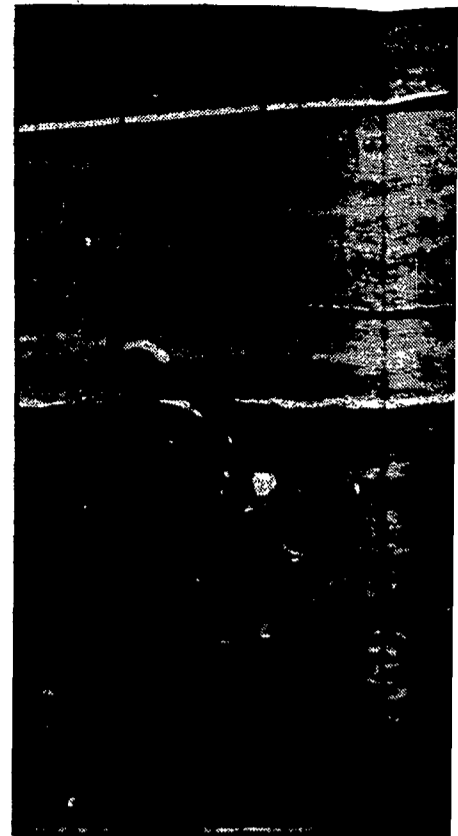
were not dissuaded by "roughing it." Donald Gutilla, 78, has suffered numerous strokes and heart attacks which may hamper his memory at times, but not his capacity to enjoy the outdoors. Armed with a colorful cane his daughter brought him from Mexico, the East Irondequoit resident, who assumed the alias of "Fletch" at camp, radiated enjoyment. From dancing to Hawaiian music with his wife, Sally, during Wednesday's cocktail hour to boat rides and campfires, "Fletch" was game. He was also overwhelmed by the cost of the camp in relation to everything that was included — meals, recreation, workshops, transportation if needed — all for just \$35. "It's just unbelievable compared to a commercial place," he said, shaking his head.

The last time 78-year-old Louie Iamele of Irondequoit said he went camping was "before the war," although he didn't attempt to qualify which war.

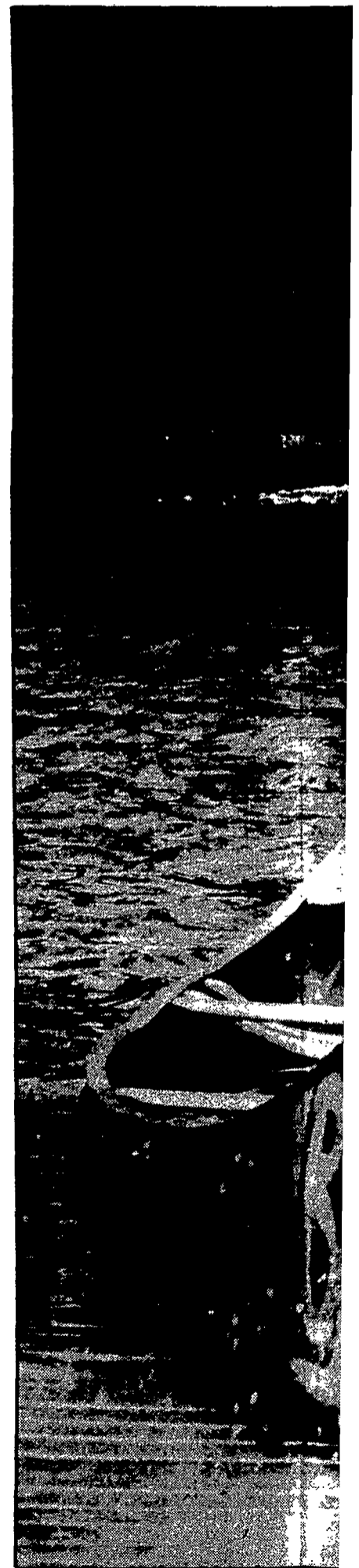
"Not that long ago!" his 71-year-old wife Alveda exclaimed but she agreed it had been a long while. The couple was having a wonderful time, and Louie had only one complaint. "I just can't settle down when I'm not in my own bed," he sighed, rubbing his back, but added "it's been worth it."

Conesus Lake brought back some very special memories for 69-year-old Mary Malta. She and her husband, who died four years ago, spent their honeymoon in a cottage called Mohawk on the lake back in 1937. "It was a swingin' place back then," she recollected with a sigh. "By the way, did you know that this place is known for not having any mosquitos?" she asked, on a less nostalgic note.

Continued on Page 15



Maureen Woodstra, left, and Victor Ma



Maureen Woodstra pauses a moment to keep it from blowing away.