

Faith

FAMILY

Natural and spiritual worlds draw families to annual summer camp

By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

Move over Mickey Mouse and make way for Father Charles Manning, the spiritual director of what has been called "a spiritual Disneyworld."

Father Manning spends part of his summer at Kamp Koinonia, a 296-acre recreation area that lies between Naples and Penn Yan in Yates County. The camp hosts four one-week Family Camp sessions sponsored by the diocesan Department of Youth Ministry. Geared to strengthening families that share Christian values, the Family Camp program is unique to this part of the state. No similar programs exist in the dioceses of Syracuse and Buffalo.

Listening to camp participants speak of their experiences, one might think they were interviewing for the position of publicity director for the program.

"I think you really have a jewel here in the diocese," remarked Jeff Greenstreet of Lebanon, Ill., whose family attended Family Camp's third session this summer, Aug. 6-12. "It's amazing to me that when we come here the place isn't jam-packed."

Greenstreet, his wife, Karen, and their three children have been coming to Kamp Koinonia for the last six years. Unable to find a similar program anywhere near their home, the Greenstreets have made the trek from Illinois every year since they first learned of the camp through an advertisement in a family magazine.

Before attending Family Camp, the Greenstreets had vacationed in Disneyworld one summer, but after spending their next year's holiday in the diocesan program, the allure of Goofy, Dumbo and the Seven Dwarves gave way to the charm of the Bible Trail and Family Hour.

"I think when you have three kids and all three said they liked it, it's a pretty good advertisement," Greenstreet commented.

On average, 12 families from within and outside the diocese participate in each weekly summer session, according to Kebby

Burnham, camp director. The grounds boast eight cabins, including four two-family structures, and 26 water and electrical hookups for trailers. A swimming pool and volleyball and basketball courts are also available for camper use.

More attractive than the facilities, though, is the camp's caring atmosphere, remarked Sharon Griffiths, a parishioner at St. Helen's in Rochester.

"It's the type of place you can come to and come back feeling really relaxed," she said, noting that being with other families who believe in Christ reinforces her family's faith. "We're all here because we choose to come to a family-type camp ... Everyone's just looking out for each other."

Most importantly, Griffiths said, her four children can learn from the Christian action of the camp's staff. "It nice to have (the children) see a Christian community at work at another setting other than the school or parish."

A typical day at the camp starts with breakfast, followed by morning sessions geared separately to adults and children. Father Manning conducts the adult sessions, while teenage volunteers from throughout the diocese oversee the sessions with youngsters. Topics discussed center on biblical or spiritual themes.

The campers then gather at noon for Mass, after which they eat a communal lunch. Time in the afternoon is unstructured until about 5 or 6 p.m. when the campers meet for dinner. In the evening, the campers meet again for a family sharing hour.

Family togetherness creates the atmosphere that attracts people like the Greenstreets, Father Manning observed. "You get closer to a family in the one week here than you do to a family in a parish in four years," he said. According to all accounts, conversations during family hour are an important part of establishing that closeness.

Tom Radel of Buffalo noted that he and his 13-year-old son had a heart-to-heart exchange following one family hour. "We

were asked to write a love letter to our children," Radel said. "Our 13-year-old and I don't show outward affection to each other. It really strengthened our relationship. We'll take that back to Buffalo."

Barb Cohen, a teen volunteer, will take pleasant memories of Radel's 8-year-old son John with her when she enters the State University of New York at Stony Brook this fall. Cohen befriended the boy during the week, and he let her know just how much he cared for her at one of the noon Masses.

During his homily, Father Manning told a story in which one of the characters tells another, "I love you forever, I like you always, Friends for ever as long as I'm living."

At the end of the Mass, 8-year-old John came up to Cohen and repeated the poem to her. "It was so spontaneous," she said. "Just beautiful."

Fellow teen volunteer David Mooney, a senior at Palmyra Macedon Central High, echoed Cohen's story in his remarks about the camp's children. "When you have children around you, you tend to observe their innocence and think, 'What if I still was like that?'" he noted.

The teenagers affect the children in a similarly positive way, asserted Paula Radel. "How they talk about the teenagers!" she exclaimed. "They write letters back and forth. The teenagers almost become part of the family," she added.

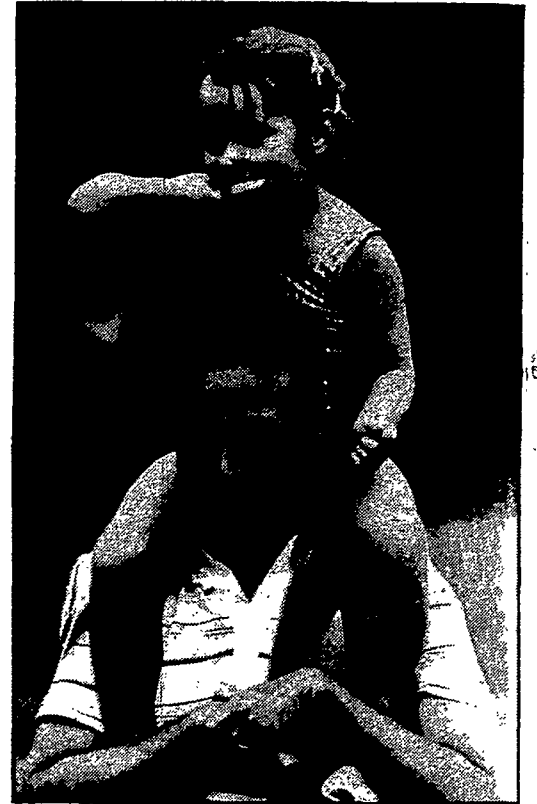
Greenstreet remarked that the camp has affected him as much as it has his children. "You go through life and you come along on an experience that changes your life, and this is one of them," he said.

EDITOR'S NOTE: The base rate for one week at Family Camp is \$235 per family. For each family member, the camp charges an additional \$45. Three scholarships in the amount of \$500 are available for families in need of assistance. For information, call Father Manning at 716/328-3210.



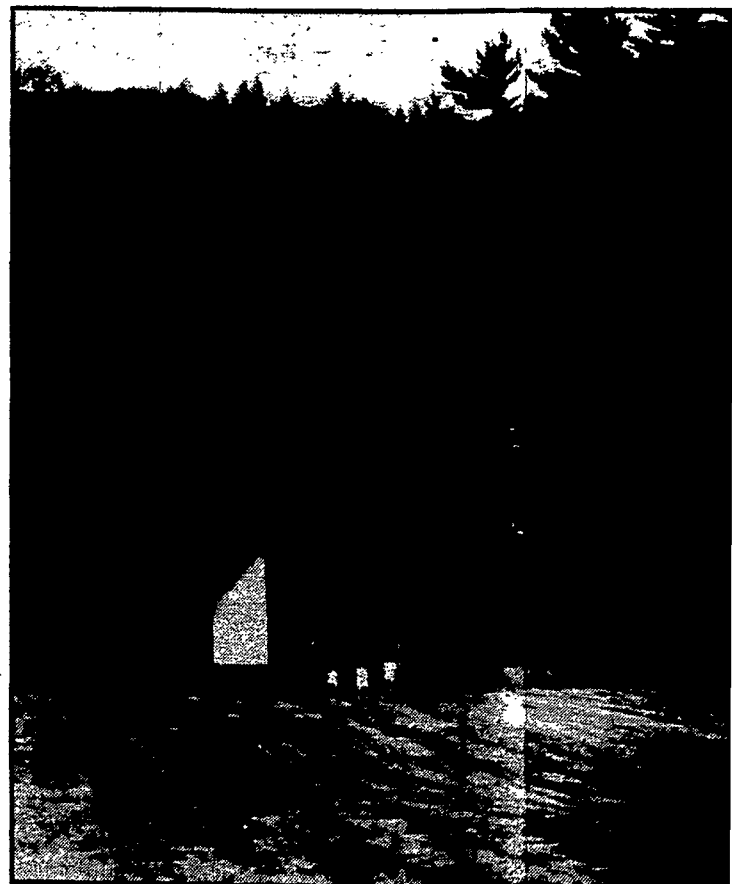
The Hardy family from Buffalo and staff counselor Mary Hoagland (center), work on the Re-Bop skit that was performed at the Friday-night campfire.

Camp staff member moves a mattress.



John and Rebecca Turner of Rochester enjoy some free time.

After a long ho



The 296-acre recreation facility offers an opportunity strengthen their relationships with each other and to sh