



... at Camp Stella Maris. Photographer Matthew Scott



The final challenge of the course is the leap of faith — from the safety of the platform to a small bar suspended from a tree.



Josh Jones unsnaps his carabiner — a snap link used to fasten ropes — as he maneuvers around a tree.



Participants work as a team, using cooperation, communication, organization and encouragement to get through a suspended tire.

THE ROPES

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out a triumphant scream. After being lowered to the ground by camp staff members, she and Rickner — who finished the course first — locked in a happy embrace.

The two Katies, both part-time employees at Camp Stella Maris, had each completed their first attempt at the high ropes course.

"I can breathe now," remarked Rickner, a parishioner at St. Thomas the Apostle Church in Irondequoit.

"I'm going to conquer the world!" added Drexel, from St. Joseph's Church in Livonia.

Another group member that day, Matt Erhard, was also jovial — and relieved — after completing the ropes course.

"It was very scary in the beginning. I'm a little scared of heights," said Matt, 14, from St. Joseph's in Livonia.

Yet when it was over, Matt said, "I wanted to go through it again."

The high ropes course is just one of many exercises making up the Adventure Based Learning Experience (ABLE), sponsored by Camp Stella Maris.

According to ABLE director Scott Liberati, nearly 50 youth groups from the diocese have used the course since it opened in 1994 at the camp. School groups, as well as campers in the Stella Maris summer program, also use it.

ABLE employs high and low course sites situated throughout the nine-

acre property at Stella Maris. The low course, Liberati said, puts heavy emphasis on teamwork, communication, and problem-solving. One activity, for example, is a game in which participants must figure out how to set logs across rocks placed a foot off the ground, and then walk, as a group, across the logs.

The high course stresses individual achievement. Along with the ropes, participants are faced with the challenge of climbing a 40-foot wall and tackling "Kong's Ladder." This giant ladder, which must be climbed by pairs, features rungs five feet apart and eight feet wide.

These exercises can seem intimidating, but Liberati said that precautions are taken. For example, on the high ropes course, participants are connected to the ropes by large hooks.

"There's the perception of danger without the presence of danger," said Liberati, who designed the ABLE facility. "We have backup upon backup."

He said that injuries on the ABLE courses have been limited to twisted ankles and scraped knees.

Liberati noted that ABLE is a good supplement to classroom course work, where teamwork is not often emphasized.

Stephanie Mikulsky agreed that group decision-making is one of the best components of the ABLE course.

"It makes you feel really awesome when you have all these problems and you figure them out," said Stephanie, 16. "You can do anything you want if you work as a team."

She and her brother, John, were among 34 youths from Church of the Transfiguration in Pittsford who attended the low course on Sept. 15. Stephanie added that her youth group is looking forward to returning to Stella Maris next month for the

high course.

Skills acquired through ABLE exercises carry over into other parts of a teen's life, Stephanie added.

"They teach you not to be scared to give your opinions," she said.

Liberati noted that assertiveness and self-esteem gained from the ABLE course can have long-lasting effects.

"It's a lot at once. A week or month later it sinks in, and you say, 'Holy cow, something's different now. I think I can do anything,'" Liberati remarked.

At the same time, Liberati stressed that ABLE's purpose is to instill confidence without turning everyone into daredevils.

"We don't want them to think they can climb up the side of the house with a clothesline," Liberati said.

EDITORS' NOTE: For information about available ABLE dates this fall, or a portable on-site ABLE program available for winter presentations, call Scott Liberati at 716/346-2243, ext. 7.

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Early finishers Katie Drexel (left) and Katie Rickner watch with self-satisfaction as others finish the course.

KIDS' ANSWERS

(from page 12)

1. Be
2. Ben
3. Baal
4. Bible
5. Behold
6. Baptist