

FEATURE

Stella Maris a summer highlight for last 75 years

By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

LIVONIA — When asked why he liked working at Camp Stella Maris, Matthew J. Flanigan, executive director, recalled one of many incidents that build up the self-esteem of the kids who come there. Flanigan cupped his hands around his mouth and repeated what one camp counselor yelled to a young camper who was parasailing for the first time on Conesus Lake.

"She was yelling 'Rob, Rob, you're doing a great job! You're going backwards — but you're doing a great job!'"

Flanigan has been working at the camp since 1979. Encouraging kids like the young parasailer to do well, even when they don't do things perfectly, is the heart and soul of Stella Maris, he noted.

"I feel bad for folks who don't have a chance to work as a camp counselor," he said. "You have an opportunity to bring value to a kid's life."

Owned by the Diocese of Rochester, Stella Maris was founded 75 years ago by two diocesan seminarians, Gerald C. Lambert and Eugene D. Hudson. Both men later became priests and Msgr. Lambert eventually became director of Diocesan Catholic Charities.

In addition to diocesan support, Stella Maris also receives crucial support from numerous volunteers, groups and donors, Flanigan said.

The 28-acre camp sits on a 700-foot lakefront, and will mark its 75th anniversary on two occasions this year. All former staff members have been invited to a picnic on Saturday, June 2, from 3 to 7 p.m.

On Saturday, Oct. 13, the camp will hold a gala event at Locust Hill Country Club in Pittsford. Details of the event are still being worked out, Flanigan said, adding that people interested in attending should call the camp at 716/346-2243, or visit its Web site at campstellamaris.org.

Interested readers can also call the camp or visit the Web site to learn about the programs Stella Maris offers all summer. For example, children between ages 5 and 10 may attend day camp, which features arts and crafts; various sports including swimming; spiritual programs; and field trips.

Resident camp, for kids ages 7-14, offers week-long programs of a similar nature. It also includes fishing and such



File photo

special events as campfires and dances. Mass is celebrated three times a week although, with the priest shortage, that number sometimes goes down to two, Flanigan said. Campers are limited to a total of four weeks at Stella Maris during the summer.

The camp offers Leadership-In-Training and Counselor-In-Training programs. The leadership program, for 15-year-olds, teaches campers how to work independently and become effective leaders. The counselor program, for 16-year-olds, puts the skills learned in the first program to practical use in a camp setting.

Camp Stella Maris also offers Winter Camp in February for kids age 11-16, with skiing at nearby Swain Ski Center. In August, there's Single Parent Family Camp for widowed, divorced and single parents and their kids.

Both at the camp and off-site, Stella Maris also offers Adventure-Based Learning Experience for young people and adults. ABLE uses such recreational experiences as ropes course to teach participants teamwork, problem-solving and other abilities.

More than 8,000 people a year use the camp for various reasons, Flanigan said, adding that groups and individuals have used the camp for retreats and gatherings.

Matt Craig, 16, and his sister, Courtney, 13, of Rochester, the children of Bob and Meami Craig, have been going to Stella Maris since they were 7 years old. Matt will be participating in the Counselor-in-Training program this summer, his mother said.

Meami Craig said her late father, S.P. "Sam" Vasile Jr., regularly sponsored children from families that couldn't afford the fee, a practice she has continued. She added that she is a big fan of Stella Maris.

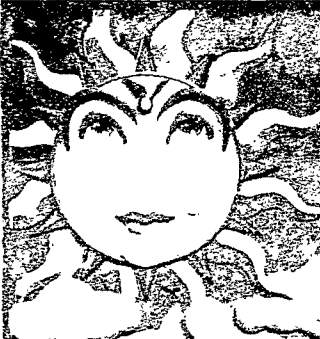
"It is a good old-fashioned, basic, wonderful summer camp," she said.

She said that the camp's spiritual programs have instilled important values in her kids. She said that she thought that they may listen more to what they hear at camp than what she and her husband tell them because of the fact that they are on their own away from home.

"It's one of the highlights of their summer," she said of Stella Maris.











The camp's Christ-centered mission keeps kids and adults coming back year after year, Flanigan said. He noted that in surveys of campers over the past dozen years, the camp's spiritual component has ranked first in the reason people like the place. Grace before all meals, musical programs, discussions and liturgies reflect that spiritual aspect, he noted. He added that non-Catholic groups also come to Stella Maris and the camp offers values-based camping experiences for kids in place of a more overtly Christian experience. Either way, he said, Stella Maris exists to help campers realize their own potentials.

"I take a great amount of pride in being associated with a place that takes kids, sight unseen, and offers them an opportunity to experience new things," he said.



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