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Dickey Lake Bible Camp

Staff and campers celebrate 80 years of faith and fun

By Traci Street
Of the Tobacco Valley News

A beloved summer camp in the Tobacco Valley will turn 80 this year, and those who care for the camp as a labor of love are planning a day of celebration in honor of the camp's history.

Dickey Lake Bible Camp has created memories for generations of children who live in the area and beyond. The camp has grown from a small spark of an idea in 1946 to an ever-evolving mix of folks from different churches and denominations, according to director Zach Zirbel.

Betty Pomeroy of Fortine was nine years old when she attended an early session of camp in 1947. That summer, campers slept in tents with mattresses made of straw. By the next year, they had long cabins with bunk beds and

windows made of boards that were propped open during the day.

Pomeroy remembers a large flatbed truck the came up from Arlee in a rainstorm with campers loaded on the back. She chuckles in amazement at the thought that all those kids rode all that way safely on a flatbed with no rails on it.

Another treasured memory was sitting on the dock one night during a thunder and lightning storm. The dock was rocking and swaying with the waves, and she and her fellow campers knew it probably wasn't safe to be there, but the amazing lightning show was just too tempting. "We just broke every rule in the book," she said with a smile.

The camp began as an alliance between about a dozen churches between Cranbrook and Hamilton, Zirbel said. A pair of brothers worked and lived among logging families in the Fortine and Trego area, and saw a real need for something positive for kids.

Harold and Beulah Erickson, who started a church in Trego, along with Harold's brother, Arvid, a pastor in Fortine, helped pull together support for the new summer camp. Though the Trego church building burned down years ago, its bell and wood cookstove survived and were installed at the camp, one-time camper Joann Waters recalls.

The camp sits on land that once belonged to the Metzner family, who approached another of the camp's founders, Ross McKenzie, and offered to sell the land for \$2,500. The McKenzies had been saving to buy a house, and as it happened, that was the exact amount they had saved. "There was a lot of sacrifice in those early years," Zirbel said.

The camp has gone through a lot of transitions over the years, including rebuilding the dining hall after it began to sink into the lake, and adding a position for a full-time director who lives on site.

Sessions have grown from 30 or so campers to 90 or more each week, and there's often a wait list for a space, Zirbel said. There seven weeks of Bible camp this summer, with sessions for kids going into third grade through high school. Campers often return year after year, and many of the older kids come back to serve as counselors.

"It's really the story of 80 years of God's faithfulness," he said.

Now in their late 80s, lifelong friends Pome-

roy and Waters remained active with the camp off and on over the decades since that first summer. Both are planning to attend the upcoming 80th birthday celebration.

The ceremony will be held on Aug. 29 at 10 a.m. at Dickey Lake Bible Camp, and will include worship, personal reflections, and a video of the camp's history. A lunch and tour of the camp will be scheduled after.

