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Published September 6th, 2015

Moraga man marks half-century of summer camps

By Cathy Dausman



Moraga resident and longtime camper Jeff Werth Photo Cathy Dausman

he leaves his razor at home.

Jeff Werth would rather interview than be interviewed, but he talks easily about his longtime commitment to summer camp.

Werth is somewhat of an expert on the swimming, fishing, hiking, basketball and arts and crafts he does in the Napa hill country, and for good reason. For the last 50 years he has attended Enchanted Hills Camp on Mt. Veeder - a camp run by Lighthouse for the Blind that serves blind children, teens, adults, deaf-blind, seniors and families of the blind, offering recreation in a fun, challenging and accessible way. Werth has only missed one session since 1968, because of illness, and his family thinks he may also be the oldest resident in attendance. He's 64.

His six-day session in late June is tailored for blind and special needs campers. It's the whole experience that brings him back, year after year, from the cooking (he says the camp's spaghetti dinner, prepared by Chef Israel was his favorite meal, adding Israel cooks better than his mother does), to his cabin mates and counselors. Ask about his favorite event and he'll tell you it was "chapel."

The only thing Werth won't do is go horseback riding - he draws the line at grooming the animals, as the camp requires its riders to do.

Initially Werth's camp was a two-week experience, but the sessions were shortened in the mid-1980s to allow for more participants. Fearing Werth would be homesick during one long camp session, his family wrote to him daily. But his counselors got tired of reading all his correspondence, so Werth put his foot down and told his family to send no letters, no post cards.

"It's always been fun to go," Werth says of this longstanding experience. If fellow campers seem anxious at first about being away from home, he insists "they'll get used to it." His family has always said he could call and ask to come home early but he has never wanted to. The one concession Werth makes for camp is not shaving -

The result, says his brother Steve, is that the normally cleanshaven man looks a bit like Grizzly Adams when gets off the bus. But the tradeoff seems worth it, and as Werth sang at this year's talent show, "Don't worry ... be happy."

For information about the Lighthouse for the Blind Enchanted Hills Camp, visit lighthouse-sf.org/programs/enchanted-hills/.

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