

Children learn valuable life lessons from 'The Camp Experience'



By Nate Smelle

For the last 35 years children have been enjoying the great outdoors at Camp Can-Aqua on the shores of Beaver Lake in Cardiff. Operating in accordance with the philosophy of its founder, Louis Gyori, Camp Can-Aqua takes pride in the fact that its programming recognizes the value of each individual child. The camp's mission is to inspire and develop the youth of today. Working as a camp director for more than 12 years now, Andrew Martin has seen firsthand how beneficial the camp experience can be for kids. Having moved over to Can-Aqua three years ago, he said he has learned a great deal from the unique program structure at Camp Can-Aqua. Unlike the other camps he has worked at Camp Can-Aqua invites the children to choose what type of programming they would like to take part in each day.

'I think camp teaches kids so many of the skills that are being missed in school and everyday life,' said Martin. 'Camp teaches the value of conversation, human connection, compromise and cooperation. We learn resilience, independence and develop a better understanding of who we are well at camp. We achieve all these things, because we are in a world offering countless opportunities with minimal distractions.'

Growing up as a camper himself, Martin spent many summers as a child on Georgian Bay. When he turned 18 he made the transition from camper to camp counsellor. His time at camp in both roles taught him to be a more patient, kind, caring, accepting and socially present person.

'I understand the value of camp because even now, some of my most remarkable memories of childhood, achievements and role models come out of my days at summer camp. My childhood heroes lived there, my best friends were made there and it was at camp where I discovered that anything is not only possible, but within my ability to achieve.'

In 1991, Gyori decided to enhance the camp experience by tapping into the trees to produce maple syrup. Since then this side of the business has expanded from a traditional operation of 30 tap buckets to more than 3,000 taps on a pipeline. Sales of the maple syrup run out of the summer camp offices and the camp's sugar shack, with proceeds from maple syrup production going towards helping send kids from low-income families to camp. The Lou Gyori Foundation focuses on making camp accessible to those in need of financial support. Currently five per cent of the kids at Camp Can-Aqua are subsidized by the sale of Gyori's maple syrup. For more information on Camp Can-Aqua visit www.canaqua.ca.