



The History of Camp Virginia Jaycee

In the early 1960's, Roanoke Jaycee William B. Robertson became interested in the welfare of the mentally retarded through his vocation as a member of the professional staff of the Roanoke City School System and as a board member of the Roanoke Area Association for Retarded Citizens. Recognizing the value of planned recreation as both therapy and training, Mr. Robertson conceived the idea of asking the Virginia Jaycees to buy and develop a campsite. With the support of Darden Towe, President of the Virginia Jaycees, Mr. Robertson developed a project to sell Apple Jelly, a typical "Virginia product" as a fund-raiser for the purchase of the camp. His idea was presented and approved by the Virginia Jaycees in 1968, and in March 1969, 140 Virginia chapters ran the first Apple Jelly Sunday project, raising \$68,000 for the camp.

On March 16, 1972, Articles of Incorporation were approved which formed a non-stock corporation called Camp Virginia Jaycees. On May 6, 1972, the Virginia Jaycees leased the camp property to Camp Virginia Jaycee, Inc. for a sum of \$1 per year for 20 years. This lease was extended for 99 years on May 6, 1982.

On September 24, 1973, the Internal Revenue Service rated that Camp Virginia Jaycee met the qualifications for non-profit status and declared it was a Section 501 (c) (3) organization. This ruling was a critical step in the long-term future of the camp.

Facilities

Located in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains adjacent to the Jefferson National forest, the ninety acre Camp Virginia Jaycee site has a setting of unsurpassed serenity and beauty. In addition to the main buildings, the site includes a playground area, swimming pool, bath house, and parking. The remaining undeveloped area consists of gently rolling woodlands with several small streams which have been developed to include areas for over night camping, hiking, and nature and riding trails/

Through the years major building projects to this Bedford County property have included improvements to Robertson hall, construction of additional cabins, renovation of cabins, construction of Murray Pavilion (Max and Steve Murray), construction of handicapped access facilities to all structures. In the 1990's, new construction included the Darden Towe Infirmary, the President's Pavilion, remodeling of the camp kitchen, construction of the sewage treatment plant, donation of the caboose by the Norfolk & Western Railroad, and construction of Werness Hall Counselors Lounge. Funds for these improvements came from the Virginia Jaycees, Virginia Jaycees Life Member Association, KOVAR, American Express Foundation, the Morgan Foundation, and the Corps of Virginia Gentlemen. Also contributing to the financing were the Rotary Club of Roanoke Valley, Bluefield State College Alumni Association, and the Boeing Aircraft Good Neighbors Fund. Much of the labor was completed by Jaycees.



Campers

In 1971, the camp opened its doors to campers for the first time. During the first year, 300 campers were served during the six weeks of camp. Since the first year, there has been a steady increase in the number of campers approximately 1,000 campers a year in the 1990's. To date, Camp has served over 45,000 families with special needs.

Camp Management

Camp Virginia Jaycee is managed by a Board of Directors. Since the beginning of Camp Virginia Jaycee, approximately 150 individuals have served on the Board of Directors of Camp Virginia Jaycee. The Board of Directors has been confronted with many challenges, including times of staff shortages, little money, lack of camper sponsorships, too many campers, and too little time to accomplish everything.

In February 1975, Ev Werness, a past National U. S. Jaycee Vice President, was hired as the full-time Executive Director.

In 1991, Maile Armstrong was hired as Camp Director, serving until 1995 when David Bolter became the Camp Director. David Bolter served until 1997 when Ev Werness assumed the dual role of President and Camp Director when Naomi Lewis, from Australia, began her training as the Assistant Camp Director, through an exchange program with the International YMCA.

A partnership with Kenya, South Africa, and Sierra Leone began in 1983 and continued until 1992, the end of Decade of the Disabled. While the program ended in 1992, Camp Virginia Jaycee still provides training in outdoor recreation and education to teachers in Africa. Organizations such as the U.S. Aid program, Sister Cities, Reston Sister Cities, the William B. Robertson Foundation, Special Olympics, and Camp Virginia Jaycee provided funds for the program.

In 2001, the Virginia Jaycees sold the property thus redefining its historic link with the Camp. Since that time, the Camp Virginia Jaycee program has continued every season. Through the hard work and dedication of Bill Robertson and the Board of Directors, Camp Virginia Jaycee has maintained a steady service to the Commonwealth. With the assistance of The Camp Doctor and Dr. Shirley O'Brien, the camp numbers have steadily increased since 2009.

In 2014, Camp Virginia Jaycee celebrated 45 years with a Founder's Day Celebration held at the camp with Founder Bill Robertson. The future is unwritten for Camp Virginia Jaycee and we are confident it is bright and will grow to serve more families in need.