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# Liberty Lake Day Camp Concludes Historical 2020 Summer Camp Season

More than 1,000 campers visited Liberty Lake Day Camp this summer and came home each day COVID-free! According to owner/director Andy Pritikin, past president of the American Camp Association, it was challenging, but not impossible at all.

**"It all starts with being outside,"** Pritikin, whose fully-outdoor camp sits on 60 shady acres just off Route 295 in Bordentown, serving families from Mercer, Burlington and Camden counties, as well as Lower Bucks and Center City Philadelphia, said in a statement. **"We treated every group of campers and staff as its own independent family – with no intermingling between groups.** These groups assembled together, played together, swam together, and ate together. While they wore face-coverings on the school buses, they did not have to wear masks nor socially distance while playing within their group of friends at camp."

The children, who had just endured months of home-quarantine, were "beyond thrilled" just to be outside, playing with their peers. In order to do so, they had to comply with a **rigorous routine of temperature checks, handwashing/sanitizing, scaled-down program, and safety protocols throughout their day.** Swim instructors taught from the deck, more than 6 feet away, with the group counselors in the water assisted the campers. The salad bar, the camp musical, and division-wide special events were either reconfigured or postponed for the season.

"Friday assemblies are a big part of Liberty Lake, as campers perform their week-long projects for each other before we sing the Liberty Lake song. To do this, we built a brand new stage on our lower field so that groups could socially distance within spread out circles – sort of like you see at big public parks. It worked like a charm," Pritikin said. Color War, Yacht or Not, Masked Singer, and other Spirit Events were all creatively modified to be able to take place safely, much to the appreciation of the campers and their families.

**Families who sent their children to Liberty Lake this summer say that they saw their children's smiles and personalities return to them within only a couple of days of camp.** Besides serving hundreds of families of essential workers, most families professed that the great reward of a camp experience, far outweighed the small risk involved given the outdoor environment and the safety precautions put in place. Pritikin estimates that 40% of his 2020 camp population was comprised of families whose prior camps chose not to open. As of press time, half of those families had re-enrolled for the Liberty Lake 2021 season.

According to Pritikin, the biggest challenge in running a day camp during the pandemic was managing the stress of his camp parents and staff. **"These brave people took on a lot of responsibility – including social responsibility –** in deciding to send their kids to camp, or to work at camp this summer. Countless staff, campers, and parents were getting COVID tested throughout the summer, any time anyone had symptoms – sore throat, stomach aches. It was all allergies, summer colds and stomach bugs – but the stress was real. I'm sure we'll soon see similar when schools bring kids back."



**Pritikin said schools can learn from the Liberty Lake camp experience.** "If camp groups can function like a family, then I don't see why we can't do the same thing with a classroom of students. Rotate the teachers in, have them wear masks and distance, but the kids can be together like we've been doing at camps and day care centers for months now. If there's a case of COVID, the class, and only the class, stays home for 14 days of quarantine. The school goes on." Pritikin says that his son and his classmates at Villanova have all been issued fold-up chairs to bring with them to class so that classes can be moved outdoors, under trees or tents.

Pritikin sympathizes, "It's very sad for the children, the parents, the teachers, everyone involved. It's easy for me to make decrees and open my camp as I want. It's much more complex dealing with boards of education and teacher unions."

