

~ Life in LAMORINDA ~

Roughing It Day Camp celebrates 45 Years of happy campers

By Lisi Burciaga



And they're off for another day of Roughing It.

Photo Pippa Fisher

Horseback riding, kayaking and fishing are all activities that add to the charm and attraction of locally based Roughing It Day Camp, which has brought joy to kids and families across the Bay Area for generations.

Lafayette residents Ann and Hobie Woods jump-started Roughing It Day Camp in 1972 and have since co-directed the camp, which works to entertain and teach valuable life skills to children ages 4 through 16 in the Bay Area. This year marks the 45th anniversary of the camp's founding.

Ann and Hobie Woods met on the job as day camp counselors, an experience which aided in sparking the idea for Roughing It years later.

"I had two little girls and there really wasn't much for them to do in the summer, and I had a really good, strong experience as a camp counselor," Ann Woods says. "Hobie said, 'Well why don't you just start a day camp?' I never thought that it would be going 45 years later."

The Woods sought a good location for their camp, which they found at the local Lafayette Reservoir.

"We found the Lafayette Reservoir which was a perfect spot for camp and still is. We had one canoe, a couple of fishing poles, and one bus and we got started," Woods says.

While the camp originated in Lamorinda, it eventually spread to other areas throughout the Bay Area, starting with the Montclair area of Oakland.

"There were really no day-camps here, so people were excited about the idea and it just caught on. Eventually people outside of Lamorinda wanted to come to our camp," Woods says. "Gradually more and more parents who were friends of friends going to our camp would come to us and say 'think of coming to Piedmont' or 'Berkeley' and so that's kind of how we expanded."

Today, the camp's bus services travel to 36 stops in East Bay, San Francisco, Contra Costa and the Tri Valley.

"The camp kind of evolved and took on a life of its own," Woods says.

Since its establishment, Roughing It has offered a variety of outdoor activities to its campers, now including horseback riding, swimming, rowing, fishing, canoeing, kayaking, hiking and more. While many activities have been around from the start, others have been acquired as the camp has grown

and developed over its 45 years of business. The camp added horseback riding about five years after its founding, starting with a group of 10 horses.

"Hobie and I had been horseback riding instructors at Kennolyn Camp and we knew that there are some special skills that you develop with a horse, and a special relationship, that you don't have with a canoe or a fishing pole," Woods says.

According to Woods, horseback riding now acts as a crucial component of Roughing It.

"Now we have 24 horses and it's a really important part of our camp. It's one of the reasons kids come to Roughing It. Kids aren't able to keep their horses in their backyard like they were 20 or 30 years ago when that was something kids could do in Lamorinda," she says.

Kayaking serves as another recreation that has been added to Roughing It since its founding. It was added around 2007 in order to teach the importance of teamwork.

"We thought kayaking would be a fun thing to add because it's two-person kayaking and we really stress working together with other people," Woods says.

She says the camp has also adapted activities such as the Outdoor Living Skills, Nature, and Environmental programs over the years. The camp's array of activities are part of what makes the camp beloved by many of its attendees.

"My daughters love the range of activities, especially the horseback riding, the swimming, and the section that's called 'Environment' where they learn about and do different games related to the environment," Lamorindan Gemini McCasland, a mother of two campers, says.

According to Ken Serwin, father of a Roughing It camper, the wide selection of quality activities are what single out Roughing It among other local day camps.

"There are lots of day camps around where your kids join a whole bunch of other kids in minimally supervised, glorified babysitting," Serwin says. "With Roughing It, you get camp. You have lake activities, the kids learn to ride a horse at the Roughing It Stables, and the kids swim at a great pool and get swimming lessons."

While many of the camp's programs have seen growth and change over the years, the Lafayette Reservoir has remained the location for a majority of the camp's activities from the start.

"The reservoir was just as wonderful then as it is now, with the beautiful grass areas and the lake to fish, row, and canoe," Woods says.

According to Jessica Almgren-Bell who worked as a Roughing It camp counselor for the summers of 2015 and 2016, it's not just the activities and location that make the camp so beloved.

"My favorite part of Roughing It is definitely the people. Yes, the location is stunning and the activities are loads of fun, but I think what sets it apart is the people," Almgren-Bell says. "Everyone comes from such diverse backgrounds, and they all bring something really unique to the table. Working with them every single day is so amazing, as they're such genuinely great people."

According to Almgren-Bell, Roughing It Day camp plays an incomparable role in the Bay Area. "I think Roughing It fosters a one-of-a-kind community within Lafayette and the greater Bay Area. It is a place for everyone — kids, teens, adults, you name it. Everyone has a place at Roughing It. It creates an environment that is truly hard to find anywhere else."

Although Roughing It didn't hold any special activities to commemorate the anniversary, they've spent their 45th year of service appreciating over four decades of happy campers, according to Woods.

"We're just celebrating being around and the fact that we have a 45th anniversary," Woods says.

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From left: Amy, Cecilio, Ann and Hobie Woods.

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