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'Smiles everywhere' at this camp

By **ED MOORHOUSE**
Burlington County Times

MEDFORD — There's nothing unusual about children participating in swimming, archery, rock climbing and scavenger hunts during a weeklong summer camp.

A closer look at the campers reveals what makes Camp Little Rock so special.

The camp is designed for children who are blind or visually impaired.

The free camp for 7- to 15-year-olds is being held this week at YMCA Camp Ockanickon on Stokes Road.

Dan Kelly, a 12-year-old from Medford, said he has been in attendance for the past six years.

"It's a really good camp, you spend time with a lot of friends and we have a really good time here," Dan said. "They help all of the kids that can't see so we can do all kinds of fun stuff."

Tina Fiorentino of Voorhees founded Camp Little Rock in 2000 so her son, Rocco, could have a typical summer camp experience.

Fiorentino said Rocco, now 11, was denied acceptance to four different summer camps because he is blind and was considered a liability risk.

"We decided to form a camp so that children who are blind or visually impaired could have the opportunity to have a camp experience like all kids," Fiorentino said yesterday.

The camp is operated by Fiorentino's Little Rock Foundation, a nonprofit organization she formed in 1997 with her husband, who also is named Rocco.

This year, 25 children are participating in the camp, the most in its eight-year history, Fiorentino said.



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"There are smiles everywhere and it's a wonderful feeling," she said.

Fiorentino said each camper is paired with a volunteer teenage mentor, who helps the camper with activities throughout the week.

"It's nice because (the mentors) feel like they are giving back to the camper, and it's also a great opportunity for friendships to build," she said.

Danielle Lichter, 14, from Jamison, Pa., and Angela Pagano, 13 from Concordville, Pa., volunteered to be teen mentors this year.

"I thought that it would be great to give these kids this experience. The things the kids are capable of amazes me," Lichter said.

Pagano said she is also inspired by the campers.

"You walk out of here thinking that you really made a difference for them. They can do everything we can do," she said.

Fiorentino said the foundation is working with Camp Ockanickon to build an arts-and- crafts pavilion, replace four log cabin structures with four new cabins, and install more boardwalks throughout the camp for wheelchair access.

Fiorentino said her foundation has raised \$300,000 to make the improvements.

For more information about the camp and the foundation, visit <http://www.tlrf.org/>.

Contact Ed Moorhouse at emoorhouse@phillyBurbs.com.

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