

SPRING 2024

THE TOWER

YMCA Camp Kern Alumni Newsletter



FROM THE OFFICE OF TODD BRINKMAN

Greetings friends! We've been hard at work all over Camp on our "Journey to June" quest. That particular journey is coming to an end as Summer Camp 2024 begins! I want to shout loud for all to hear a mighty roar of THANK YOU to all who helped get us here successfully. Especially, thank you all of those that came to our Spring Camp Work Day. We were able to get so much done. Over 60 people in attendance, with over 480 work hours. That is two months' worth of work for our maintenance team. Camp runs best when our volunteers are engaged and active members of our community. Please consider joining us for the Fall Camp Work Day on October 12th, 2024. Here are a few projects that are making a positive impact on camp right now:

- New pool Liner
- Renovations to The Perch for improved staff housing
- Continued development and signage for the Camp Kern Petting Zoo
- Ozone Course Maintenance
- Fresh coats of paint in many areas throughout camp (Moore Building, Exterior of Pool House)
- Porch Swing installation by the multi-purpose courts
- New multi-purpose court that includes Pickle Ball, Four Square and Basketball – we are really excited to be putting energy and resources into this hub of camp that is used by guests who attend camp through ALL of our program departments.

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From the Office of Todd Brinkman, *Continued*

It's been a great year for our fundraiser events, from the Bob Barr Golf Outing in September, the Arctic Dash in December, Beer & Wine Tasting Event in February and the Dayton YMCA's annual meeting Auction. Through these efforts and the commitment of so many like you, we are so close to reaching our Annual Campaign Goal of \$105,000. This makes it possible for us to help hundreds of kids come to camp, whose families need financial assistance to make this happen.

This spring we piloted a new program at Circle K Ranch – a Spring Round Up Day Camp over the week of spring break for our local kids. It sold out and was a huge success! Thank you to Jessica Mullins and her team at the barn for their efforts to help those campers have such a fun and meaningful experience at camp while they were out of school. Our summer Day Camps continue to grow as well, with traditional Camp Sunrise, Boot and Bits at the Ranch, and Lil' Farmers, who will get to experience the Ranch spending time with and learning about our various farm animals – from collecting eggs, to feeding goats and ducks, and caring for our mini highland cow, Tucker.

We are fortunate to be working on a Strategic Plan right now, which will help propel Camp Kern forward for the next 3-5 years. With things like improved software to keep up with our ever-growing complex calendar of guests experiencing Camp Kern in such a variety of ways, to assessing and adjusting our division of work so we are running in our most efficient and smooth manner. It takes a lot of work by everyone here at camp to do this, and I am so proud to be part of this team of knowledgeable, talented, and dedicated individuals, whose whole is indeed greater than the sum of its parts.

Please help me welcome our new Board Members: Max Blalock, Justin Bennett and Scott Kenney! We are glad you've joined us and excited for our future with the strength of this great group. And huge congratulations go to Lori Schwartz-Noel, Camp Kern's Volunteer of the Year, and Board Chair Andrea Kaercher for being recognized as YMCA of Ohio's State Volunteer of the Year! I'm proud to know and work with you both!

See you 'round the campfire,

Todd



The Pool

The Early Days

From early on, the pool has been the heart and center of YMCA Camp Kern, serving as a hub of activity and joy for countless campers over the decades. This historic photo captures the pool's construction in the late 1940s, marking the beginning of its enduring legacy. Generations of campers have cherished their time splashing and playing in its waters. Recognizing the pool's significance, we undertook a much-needed renovation over the winter, installing a new liner to ensure its continued operation. This upgrade will help preserve the pool's structural integrity and ensure that it remains a source of fun and cherished memories for many years to come.

Staff Spotlight - The Mullins Family

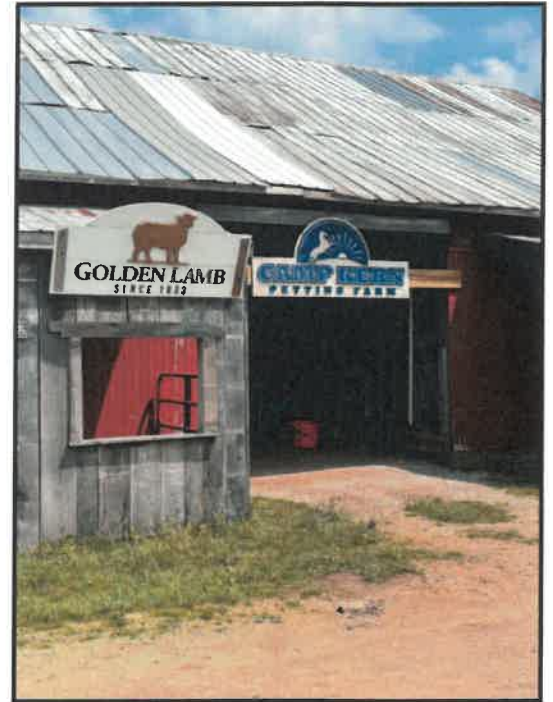
When Jo Ellen first arrived at Camp Kern, she impressed Larry Maxwell from the start – showing up to talk about the Program Director position with notes in hand for needed changes. She took a chance, packed up her 3 kids and 2 dogs, and moved to Camp Kern! By the end of that first summer, she was our Equestrian Director, and served in that role for three more summers. Her next adventure led her to a job in Alabama, and a certain Eric Mullins whom she had met here through a mutual friend, joined her in the move. After they were married, they found their way back to Ohio. She has continued her work with horses and equestrian programs to this day. She smiles as she talks about keeping in touch with so many camp counselors from her first years here, including several who also met their spouses through working at Camp Kern.

And her family is making a difference at camp as well. One of those three kids, who hung around the barn while her mom worked, was Jessica Mullins, who is completing her second year as Camp Kern's Equestrian Director. With a background focused in Therapeutic Riding, Jess brings a wealth of experiences to her role here. So what brings her the most joy? Not surprisingly, it's working with the kids, watching the transformation that can occur in one week. This happens through learning: how to groom, how to control a horse, and go from being intimidated by these 1,000 pound animals, to being a confident rider. This certainly involves hard days. If you ask Jess, the best remedy to that is to hug a horse of course!

But wait, there's more! Becoming a key member of Kern's maintenance department last year is none other than Eric Mullins. Given the choice of working indoors in machining, or primarily outdoors, knowing he makes a positive impact on our campers – the decision was easy. He's gotten to help build the petting zoo, among the many projects since he started, and getting to see when something is completed and put into action provides a great sense of accomplishment.

Each of them has their own favorite spot in camp. Eric loves being part of lessons and riding in the arena best. Jess chooses the trail out to Brisben – going around Elk Lake and through the hay fields, for both the peaceful beauty and the memories it holds for her. For Jo Ellen, simply passing through the entrance of camp is meaningful, and spiritual. As she made this leap of faith with her children those many years ago, she prayed. She felt God's presence here as she entered, and she feels it to this day.

And do they enjoy working together? In Jess's words, "That's what camp is all about – being around family". Eric notes that of course they don't always agree on the best approach to every situation, but "the greater side is getting to see Jessica blossom, and watching her become this amazing director. And I'm super super proud." And as Jo Ellen puts it, "we wouldn't want to be doing anything else". Camp Kern is so fortunate to have this continued legacy of service, and we thank you Mullins Family!



New Signage at the Petting Zoo



Covered Wagon Chicken Coop



Friendly and Photogenic Goat

FROM THE CAMP ARCHIVES

Local Newspapers Discuss the Building and dedication of Optimist Pond

500 Witness Camp Kern's Anniversary

By WILLIAM A. HECK
Dayton Herald Staff Writer

LEBANON—Nearly 500 persons visited the Dayton YMCA's Camp Kern yesterday to help the camp celebrate its 50th anniversary and prepare for the future.

They witnessed a groundbreaking ceremony for the Breakfast Optimist lake, participated in the dedication of the Rotary Memorial chapel, ate a smorgasbord dinner and heard an address by the executive director of the American Camping association.

BREAKFAST OPTIMIST

LAKE

GIFT BY

DAYTON BREAKFAST OPTIMIST CLUB



An Optimist By Any Other Name Is..

LEBANON — Spelling lessons seem to be in order for the person who painted this sign at the site of the Breakfast Optimist lake at Camp Kern. Note the word "Optimist" misspelled twice. No one seemed to notice yesterday, however, and groundbreaking proceeded as scheduled. A bulldozer (right rear) was used to move the earth. (Staff Photos by George Adams)

Nestled in the heart of YMCA Camp Kern, the Optimist Pond has been a cherished sanctuary of fun and tranquility for over six decades. Since its creation in 1960, thanks to the generous donations from the Dayton Breakfast Optimist Club, this serene pond has become a symbol of joy, adventure, and community spirit. Generations of campers have fond memories of sunny days spent fishing, catching frogs, and basking in the beauty of nature.

For many, the pond is not just a body of water, but a place where lifelong friendships were formed, lessons in patience and perseverance were learned, and countless laughter-filled moments were shared. It's the place where young campers caught their first fish, felt the thrill of discovery with every frog found, and experienced the simple yet profound pleasure of being outdoors.

As we reflect on these precious memories, we are reminded of the profound impact the Optimist Pond has had on our camp and its visitors. It stands as a testament to the vision and generosity of the Dayton Breakfast Optimist Club and the enduring spirit of Camp Kern. For thousands of campers, the pond has been a gateway to the wonders of nature and a cornerstone of their camp experience.

Today, we honor this legacy by ensuring that the Optimist Pond continues to be a source of joy for everyone. We are excited to announce a new project that aims to make the pond accessible to all campers and guests, regardless of their physical abilities. Our goal is to build a ramp and dock that will allow everyone to enjoy fishing and the beauty of the pond, creating an inclusive environment where every individual can experience the magic of Camp Kern.

We are thrilled to share that we have already raised \$20,000 of the \$30,000 needed for this important project. The overwhelming support from our community is a testament to the enduring love and connection so many of us feel towards the Optimist Pond. Yet, we are not quite there, and we need your help to cross the finish line.

We invite you to join us in this meaningful endeavor. Your support will help ensure that the Optimist Pond remains a place of joy and inclusion for future generations. Whether you are a former camper with fond memories or a friend of Camp Kern who believes in our mission, your contribution can make a difference.

For those interested in helping us reach our goal, please reach out to Todd Brinkman. Together, we can preserve the legacy of the Optimist Pond and create new opportunities for all campers to enjoy its beauty and charm.

**Calling All Alumni and Friends:
Help Us Reach Our Goal of 5,200 Zipliners This Summer!**

OZONE ZIPLINES

Since its launch in 2009, Ozone Zipline Adventures, a department of YMCA Camp Kern, has been a vital resource in supporting our Outdoor Education programs. It was created to offset the decline in traditional Outdoor Education school groups attending camp due to budget constraints. Ozone Zipline's revenue has been crucial in keeping these educational experiences affordable for local schools and providing financial assistance to ensure more students can experience the impact of an overnight field trip.

However, Ozone Zipline Adventures has faced a dramatic decline in zipliners post-COVID. To revitalize this essential program, we need your help. We're calling on all alumni and friends to make this the biggest summer yet for Ozone and help put us back on the adventure map. Your participation will directly support hundreds of school kids attending camp.

What to Expect on Your Zipline Adventure

Guests will suit up and fly on zip lines that breeze through and above the canopy of the Little Miami River valley. Our two professional and knowledgeable tour guides will escort each group of up to 10 participants from platform to platform.

As part of this educational canopy tour, guests will gain insights into everything from 500 million-year-old fossils and 2,000-year-old Native American earthworks to current issues of water conservation and habitat loss. You'll also learn about local flora and fauna from our expert guides. Ozone Zipline Adventures offers a unique vantage point to view millions of years of history while providing thrilling experiences you won't soon forget.

Join Us for Our Largest Summer Yet!

We are aiming to make this summer our largest since opening in 2009, with a goal of over 5,200 zipliners. Your participation not only promises a day of unforgettable adventure but also supports a worthy cause, helping to ensure that more schools can benefit from the outdoor education programs at Camp Kern.

Book Your Adventure Today!

Don't miss out on this thrilling experience that combines fun, education, and the joy of supporting our community. Gather your friends, family, and fellow adventure-seekers and help us reach our goal of 5,200 zipliners this summer. Together, we can put Ozone Zipline Adventures back on the adventure map and send hundreds of school kids to camp.

To book your tour or for more information, visit our website or contact us at 513.932.3756. Let's make this the best summer yet for Ozone Zipline Adventures and Camp Kern!

We look forward to seeing you soar through the treetops with us soon!



SCAN ME

Book Today!

ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT

Danica Bullock



Camper 2016 - 2022

Meet Danica Bullock, an alumni camper who attended Camp Kern from 2016-2022. She started her journey with the "Taste of Kern" day camp, then moved into Explorer and Adventure Villages and eventually became a Counselor-in-Training (CIT). Her involvement extended beyond the summer with Project Trust, a leadership program that connects students during the school year through Clinton-Massie Local Schools.

Danica's initial inspiration to attend camp was a mix of wanting to make new friends and spend time outdoors. Despite initial nerves about staying overnight without her mom, she quickly fell in love with the camp experience and didn't want to go home after a day of fun. Friendships have been a cornerstone of Danica's camp experience. She chose to attend camp without knowing anyone. She enjoyed making new friends each summer and still stays connected with many of them through social media.

Her favorite memories include conquering her fear on the twin zip line, which she loved so much that she asked to do it for her graduation celebration. She also cherished the time spent during Dutch auctions on stormy days, where the whole camp gathered. As a CIT, she led these events, finding joy in seeing everyone come together. One adventurous memory from Project Trust was climbing Pete's Tower at 3 AM with counselors—a thrilling experience, albeit slightly mischievous. A funny memory involved getting stuck on Elk Lake during a massive storm with a curtain of rain and hail—a moment that was terrifying at the time but amusing in hindsight. If she could bring any item from camp to home, it would be the gaga pit, as she had endless fun playing there. One of her favorite camp traditions is Chapel with the spirit stick. Every morning, campers prepared and performed songs, and the winning cabins get to decorate the spirit stick. A counselor who left a lasting impression on her was Maggie from Adventure Village, an energetic and fun counselor who truly engaged with the campers.

Camp has had a profound impact on Danica's life outside of camp. She even chose to have her graduation party at camp, a testament to how much the place means to her. She says the biggest attribute that Camp Kern has given her is independence and confidence. She is not hesitant about trying new things or meeting new people. Her biggest piece of advice to new campers is to not be too nervous and know that you will try new things and make new friends! The picture of Danica holding the flagpole was during a big game where she racked up points for holding onto it the longest! The zip line picture is from her graduation celebration at Wilderness Lodge.



Alumni and Friends Work Day

On April 6, 2024, Camp Kern hosted its annual Workday event, bringing together a dedicated team of AmeriCorps volunteers, CITs, Board Members, former counselors, friends, and family to improve our campgrounds. This day highlighted the power of teamwork as volunteers tackled various projects with enthusiasm.

Key Highlights:

- **New Bunk Beds:** Volunteers assembled new bunk beds in the three upper circle cabins, promising campers cozy nights of rest.
- **Accessibility and Safety:** Graveling paths to the Yurts and installing new trail lights enhanced both the beauty and safety of our trails.
- **Facility Improvements:** Wood deck repairs at Brisben, window cleaning, clearing the horse trail to Hickory Hog, and preparing for the new Dino Dig added to the vitality and excitement of our camp.
- **Sustainability Efforts:** New drain lines installed in front of Singerman underscore our commitment to sustainability and maintaining top-notch facilities.

We extend our heartfelt gratitude to all volunteers for their hard work and dedication, making this Workday a success. Your passion drives our growth and fosters a stronger community.



Alumni and Friends Events

Golf Outing - September 30, 2024 - Join us for our annual golf outing at YMCA Camp Kern, a perfect day to gather a foursome and enjoy a fun round of golf. We are seeking both golfers and sponsors to make this event a swinging success, with all proceeds helping to send kids to camp and fund program enhancements.

Fall Work Day - October 26, 2024 - Join us for our Fall Work Day at YMCA Camp Kern, where alumni and friends come together to tackle a variety of projects, from painting to small maintenance tasks and more. It's a perfect opportunity to give back, reconnect, and make a tangible difference in our beloved camp.

Pre-Thanksgiving Dinner - November 26, 2024 - Come join us for our annual Pre-Thanksgiving Dinner at YMCA Camp Kern, where camp provides the turkeys and guests bring the sides and desserts. It's the perfect time to reconnect, share camp tales, and enjoy a festive feast with friends and alumni.

Beer & Wine Tasting - February 8, 2025 - Join us for our annual Beer and Wine Tasting event at YMCA Camp Kern, a wonderful evening filled with bluegrass music, tasty drinks, and plenty of cherished camp memories. It's the perfect occasion to reconnect with friends and celebrate the spirit of camp in a relaxed, festive atmosphere.

Kern Makes a Life-Long Impact

Remember those magical summers at Camp Kern? The laughter around the campfire, the thrill of conquering the ropes course, the friendships that felt like family, and the memories that have stayed with you through the years. Whether you were a camper discovering the joys of nature or a staff member guiding young hearts, Camp Kern was more than just a place—it was an experience that shaped us all.

Today, we are reaching out to you, our cherished alumni, to help us continue this legacy. Our annual campaign is underway, and we are \$6,000 away from our goal. These funds are essential to ensure that children who otherwise could not afford it get the opportunity to create their own Camp Kern memories.

Just as Camp Kern left an indelible mark on your heart, your donation can do the same for a new generation of campers. Imagine the smiles on their faces as they paddle a canoe for the first time, the confidence they gain from overcoming their fears, and the lifelong friendships they will forge—all because of your generosity.

Your support is not just a donation; it's a gift of experience, growth, and joy. It's a chance to pass on the magic of Camp Kern to children who need it most.

Please consider contributing to our campaign. Your donation, no matter the size, will make a profound difference. Let's come together and ensure that the spirit of Camp Kern continues to thrive in the hearts of future campers and staff for many, many years to come.

Thank you for being a part of the Camp Kern family and for helping us make a lasting impact. Scan the QR code to donate today!



Alumni Committee

Andrea Kaercher
Curtis Wright
Emily Tittle
Lori Schwartz
Megan Trowbridge
Jesus Castano*
Loretta Deters*
Sara Brinkman*
Todd Brinkman*

*Camp Staff

As a member of the Camp Kern community, you already know what an incredible experience it is to spend time at camp. The memories, friendships, and skills gained during your time at Kern are likely some of your most cherished possessions. As such, we would like to extend an invitation for you to get involved with the Camp Kern Alumni Committee.

The committee is responsible for designing events, writing newsletters, and recruiting alumni participation. By joining the committee, you'll have the opportunity to help plan events that bring the Kern community together, stay informed about camp news and updates, and help build a strong network of Kern alumni.

Whether you're interested in organizing events, writing articles for the newsletter, or simply want to stay connected with your fellow Kern alumni, we'd love to have you join the committee. Your involvement will not only help us continue to build a vibrant alumni community, but it will also give you the chance to stay connected to the place that holds such a special place in your heart. Email us at campkernfamily@gmail.com.