

## Family Focus



Lea Trager of Waterford, who was a camper in the 1950s, shows Jonah Geller, Tamarack Camps executive director, some of her camp memorabilia.

Staff photos by Angie Buan



Karen Begres and her daughter, Talia, 21 months, of West Bloomfield enjoy the waterfront.

# Alumni Family Fun Day

Generations unite for a traditional day at Camp Maas.

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**L**ea Trager, 61, of Waterford barely stepped foot onto Camp Maas property before she encountered Jonah Geller, Tamarack Camps executive director.

She caught his attention by pulling camp memorabilia from a big bag. Out came a series of formal black-and-white camper group photos, yellowed song sheets and dog-eared camp calendars dating back to the 1950s, when Trager was a camper. She later was a counselor and village supervisor, ending her camp career in 1980.

Boy, was she glad to be at camp again. The joy was evident in her face as she glanced around at the tall pine trees and well-worn paths around her. She was attending Tamarack Camps' first Alumni Family Fun Day on June 22, along with 1,200 others who took advantage of the perfect summer day to enjoy traditional camp fun — swimming, kayaking, water skiing, horseback riding, arts and crafts and catching up with old friends.

Tamarack Camps, under the umbrella of the Fresh Air Society, began its camping program in 1902, tying it as the oldest Jewish camp in the country, along with Surprise Lake Camp in New York.

"This day is the culmination of decades and decades of campers and staff enjoying what we hold dear to our camp tradition," Geller said.

Alumni Family Fun Day is the giant step in serious outreach to alumni, says Susie Zaks, director of special programs. "The goal is to keep people connected, and there had been no

Laynie Langnas and daughter, Leah, 9, of West Bloomfield in midflight on the Tango Tower swing



Makena Duval, 7, of West Bloomfield checks out horseback riding.



formal gathering. There are so many generations involved.”

“My mother was a camper here as well as my brothers Alex and Eddie Glassman,” Trager said. “And my children, Jason and Stacey, came, too. Jason met his wife at camp.”

Walking the paths, you’d see grandparents who had been campers, along with their children who had been campers, along with grandchildren who are current campers.

Gloria Leader of West Bloomfield was part of such a multigenerational group. She attended camp in the mid-1940s. Her granddaughter, Isabel Leader, 9, is anticipating her first session this summer.

“It goes from generation to generation,” Gloria Leader said, then moved away from her family to whisper that as a 16-year-old she and the senior girls had staged a serious raid on the senior boys. Some things never change.

Alumni Family Fun Day was held on the last day of staff orientation, just two days before campers arrived. The event gave the staff a chance to practice their skills.

Counselor Ben Rothenberg, 18, of West Bloomfield was supervising tile painting. The drying tiles would be assembled later in the summer into a mosaic in honor of the alumni event.

“I like camp a lot,” said Rothenberg, who was a camper for six years and staff for two. “It’s just camp, just fun.”

Former camper and staff member Bert Green of Farmington Hills waxed more poetic.

“Camp used to seem so big. I went into the arts and crafts cabin, and I remembered that musty camp smell from 31 years ago.” His young daughter, Samantha, 5, making a tile, is certainly a future camper.

“I haven’t been back here since 1990, and it’s unbelievable. The staff is so welcoming, and it’s great seeing people I haven’t seen in 10-15 years,” he said.

At the Tango Tower, a high-rise climbing structure that stretches into the trees, Tamarack Camps treasurer Michael Langnas was watching his daughter, Leah, 9, and wife, Laynie, being hoisted up in harness for an exhilarating swing from the side of the tower.

“The Tango Tower was built two years ago,” he said. “It’s a new experience for the kids. That’s what camp is all about — getting Jewish kids together for experiences.”



Ben Rothenberg

This summer, 1,300 campers and 352 staff will participate in the various components of Tamarack Camps.

Rachel Ellis and Lori Weberman chaired Alumni Family Fun Day, with assistance from Tamarack Camps professionals Zaks and Carly Leipsitz.

Major sponsors for the event were Star Trax Event Productions and Schechter Wealth Strategies. The *Jewish News* also was a sponsor. Photos from the event can be seen at [www.tamarackcamps.com](http://www.tamarackcamps.com). □



Janis Moss and her daughter, Madeline, 4, of Bloomfield Hills paint a tile.



Former camper and counselor Bert Green and his daughter, Samantha, 5, of Farmington Hills