

# PROGRESS

*Neighbors*

## BREAKING BARRIERS

Camp For All  
enriches  
lives of  
children,  
adults with  
challenging  
illnesses,  
special needs

By Natalie Frels  
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**A**

couple of years ago a girl with epilepsy was at Camp For All — a Burton-area camp that specializes in camp for people with special needs.

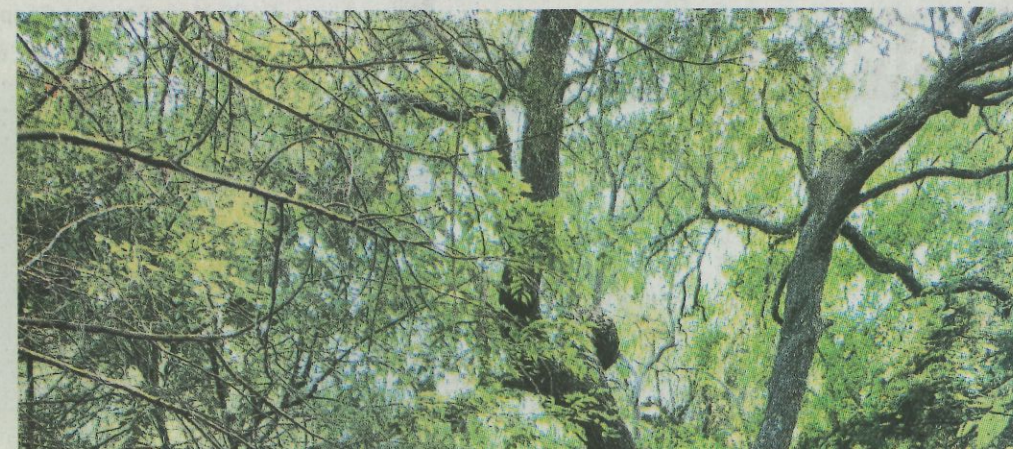
She suffered a seizure during her time at the camp and figured it was game over.

Her counselor had other ideas.

“Hey, let’s go to the archery range,” she told the young girl who was ready

who because of illness or disability had limited opportunities to experience the joy of camp.

The three began working to that end with the acquisition of the property here in Washington County. Working in collaboration with 19 non-profits already operating modified camping programs for special needs population, the goal was to discover the precise needs for the people they served before designing





The camp, located in northwest Washington County on the upper reaches of Lake Somerville, was the dream of Dr. Bo Zeller, Dr. Paul Gerson and Larry Neuhaus back in 1993. The Houston trio wanted to see a camp developed that embraces those

But the achievements of the camp far outstretch Washington County. A new program called Camp For All

A photograph showing a wooden boardwalk with railings leading through a dense forest. The boardwalk is made of wooden planks and has a dark railing. It curves to the right and then straightens out, overlooking a body of water. The forest is lush with green trees and foliage. The water is visible in the distance, surrounded by more trees. The overall scene is peaceful and scenic.

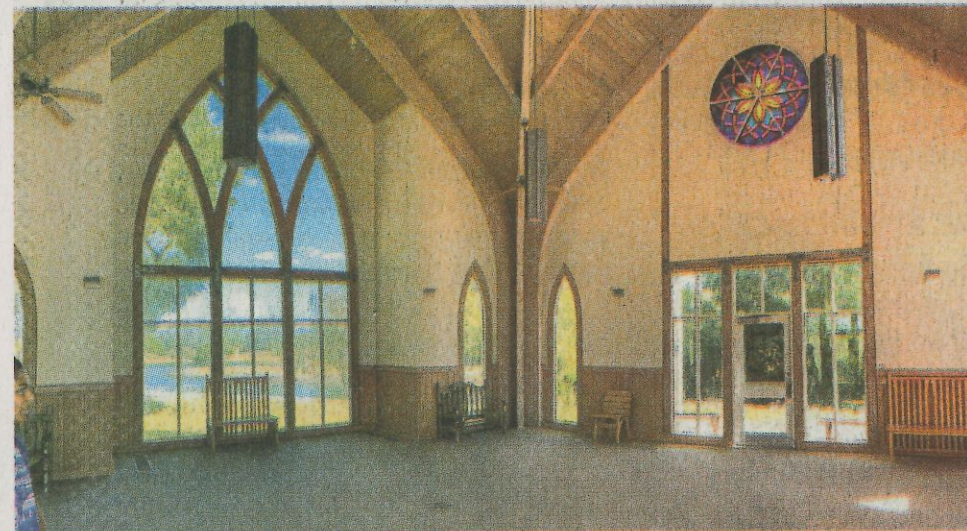
The Tree House at Camp For All is a fan favorite among campers and staffers alike. The pathway is wide enough to roll a wheelchair along the pathway that overlooks a ravine full of wildlife.







The costume room inside Star Place has everything you need to dress the part, no matter the occasion.



The Chapel at Camp For All embraces all religions.





Continued from B4

2U is an outreach program in its fourth year that provides inclusive, week-long camp experiences, indoors and in town, for campers who can't physically come to the Camp For All site.

Activities include canoing, archery, s'mores, arts and crafts and other activities. The program takes place in hospitals in the Texas Medical Center, as well as at Bo's Place, a bereavement center, in Houston. The program also has a partnership with Dell Children's Hospital in Austin.

"We are driven by our strategic planning process, so that called for an outreach program of some kind," Sorrells said. "We always had it in the back of our minds but we didn't have the ability to implement it yet. M.D. Anderson asked us, 'Have you ever thought about doing a program in the hospital?' And we all sat and grinned at each other and said yes. Three months later we started it.

"We're growing it slowly



Camp For All president and CEO Pat Prior Sorrells shows donors Rogers Crain of the Crain Family Foundation and Tom Brown of The Hamill Foundation some of the newest features that helps the hearing impaired during a dedication of a new amphitheater and improved canoe facilities.

because its' volunteer driven, so we're in Austin and a bunch of hospitals in Houston. It's incredible programming for those kids that can't leave the hospital."

A study found kids participating in these camps "grew in self-confidence in an environment of understanding."

"They weren't alone and

they found hope, so those are three pretty powerful messages," she said.

This outreach program won the Eleanor P. Eells Award from the American Camp Association (ACA) in 2017. The Eleanor P. Eells Award recognizes "program excellence as well as excellence in research in practice at camps." Camp For All was selected amongst a final group of six nominees by the National Awards Committee and the Committee for the Advancement of Research

and Evaluation as a collaborative initiative.

In July, Sorrells was also a recipient of the Houston Business Journal's 2019 Most Admired CEOs Award.

"Pat Sorrells is known as the gold standard for not-for-profit CEOs. She has the rare combination of strong business skills and the ability to inspire others, all the while projecting a passion for the organization, employees and those we serve," said Michael E. Lewter, chairman of the board of directors for Camp

For All in his letter of recommendation.

Camp for All now has a waitlist due to its popular services and population growth.

"The need continues to grow so we are looking for how we can meet that need. We're not able to serve the current community. That's part of our strategic plan is to see how we can solve that problem" Sorrells said. "Part of our plan is to continue to grow Camp For All 2U and it continues to grow every year,

on numbers, we have to look at bigger opportunities.

"It's important that the economic impact of Camp For All is now at \$11 million, it was \$8 million in 2010. So our economic impact on the community is growing, too."

The camp employs 40 full-time staff members in the summer and 40 seasonal staffers, which has seen growth over the past four years.

Camp for All already has something to celebrate in 2020 with the announcement of Camp Director Kurt Podeszwa receiving the National Service Award from the American Camp Association.

The American Camp Association honors those who lead the way in exploratory leadership, service and in passionate commitment to the value of the camp experience. Podeszwa will be honored and receive his award in February.

The Camp For All team is comprised of some of the best and most experienced professionals in the not-for-profit industry. Combined, their leadership team has more than 50 years of experience in special needs camping. Every individual who makes up the Camp For All team, no matter what the position, has a passion for making a difference and serving others, and comes to work every day with the goal of fulfilling their mission.

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