

Volunteers help make camp special for courageous kids

By **STEVE LeBLANC**
Special to *The Champion*

TEN-YEAR-OLD DENISE ALLIN may be headed to Priceville, Ontario next week, but her upcoming camping trip will be completely free of charge, thanks to a group of dedicated volunteers.

The Campbellville girl will be one of 60 southern Ontario children attending Camp Quality. The camp has been operating for the past nine years, yet the overall Camp Quality program came into being much earlier.

"The camp, designed for children three to 16 with cancer or in remission, was first started by a woman named Vera Entwistle in Australia in 1983. Since then, it has become a world-wide program," said Beth Gordon, media coordinator and volunteer for the Priceville camp. Camp Quality holds two camps in Ontario as well as ones in the United States, New Zealand, South Africa, Romania, Fiji and the Czech Republic.

This will be Denise's second year there.

The grade 5 student at Kilbride Public School was diagnosed more than three years ago with an aggressive form of leukemia. After weeks of chemotherapy and surgery at Hamilton's McMaster University Medical Centre, her leukemia went into remission and has not resurfaced.

Successful transplant

Her road to recovery also included a successful bone marrow transplant at Toronto's Hospital for Sick Children, with the help of younger sister Kristen, now eight, as a donor.

Her mother Cindy heard about the camp through a fellow cancer patient's mother in the summer of 1994 and immediately inquired about her daughter's attendance in 1995. The camp is held during the same week in August each year.

One aspect of the camp Ms. Allin finds particularly nice is the one-on-one relationship campers form with the volunteers. Each child is paired up with an older companion for the week.

"It's great for the kids to have that one-on-one relationship and spend some real time with a dedicated adult," said Ms. Allin. Ms. Gordon added that many campers and their companions stay in touch all year long through regular reunions and planned excursions.

Denise said she liked the one-on-one relationships formed at the camps and that she was really looking forward to next week. "My favorite part last year was riding in the small airplanes. My companion was Tammy Deluca of Pickering. We still stay in touch once in a while," said Denise, who also got together with a number of other campers this May for a special trip to Florida's Disney World that was also free.

Corporate sponsorships

Ms. Gordon said the camp is able to operate without charging the families because of corporate sponsorship. Esso/Imperial Oil is the camp's main sponsor, while various other companies help out as well.

"The main difference with Camp Quality compared to other camps is that everyone here is a volunteer. There is not one single paid employee at the camps



Photo by GRAHAM PAINE

Campbellville's Denise Allin is a happy camper thanks to the selfless efforts of volunteers who often donate their vacation time to helping out kids.

and that includes the medical staff. Everyone donates a week of their summer vacation," she said. Approximately 120 volunteers will be part of next week's camp in Priceville.

She said these camps benefit both the children and their families. While the children enjoy the week at camp, families are given some breathing space from the daily routine of caring for a child with cancer.

This year's camp theme is 'Come to the Circus'. Along with regular activities — which include canoeing, horse back riding, small-craft airplane rides, woodworking, archery and golfing — next week's camp will feature a special carnival Thursday when all campers will dress up and enjoy popcorn, cotton candy and other carnival treats.

"The camps are chock full of activity and the one-on-one relationships make them even more special. It's like a big-sister, big brother situation and seeing the smiles on the children's faces is reward enough for all the volunteers," Ms. Gordon said.

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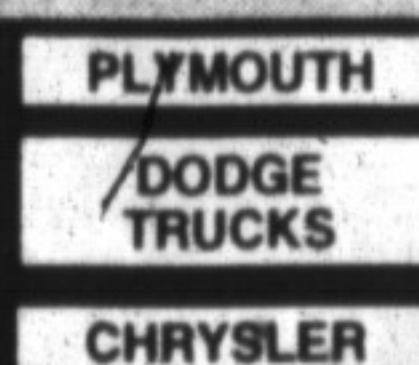
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