

Julia Riseman

From: Gary Kibort, Herzl Camp <gary@herzlcamp.org>
Sent: Tuesday, December 25, 2018 10:30 AM
To: Julia Riseman
Subject: Got a minute?



It's Christmas morning and I have some time on my hands...

Before we head out for Chinese and a movie (and while my family argues over Aquaman or Mary Poppins), I want to talk with you about some behind-the-scenes work we are doing at Herzl Camp.

We've been looking back on 2018 and making plans for 2019...

Living at camp each summer gives me an inside view of the everyday miracle of Jewish camp. Last summer had more than its share of joyful ruach and everyday miracles!

At the same time, like every summer, we had some challenges both unforeseen and expected.

Your support through this year has once again given us the resources and expertise to address our challenges and ruach to celebrate our successes!

Here are some milestones worth celebrating and some challenges worth considering:

Oy Vey - the Waterfront!

It was a tough summer on the lake. Our aged ski boat was out of the water for weeks and our pontoon is actually an antique. It was very clear to all that a major investment needed to happen asap.

Apparently G-d was listening and we found a passionate friend who had been bothered by the sad state of our waterfront activities for some time. With the help of Marlys and Elliott Badzin, we are in the midst of a huge expansion that will turn our **waterfront into waterFUN!**

While we now have the resources to solve this challenge, we are working hard to quickly create a safe, well-planned, well-run program and the clock is ticking to June 2019. It's a real challenge but many community members and our colleagues at other independent camps have stepped up to help us get this done in time. I am **awed and grateful** for the time and talent given to Herzl Camp, now even more than usual.

One key issue with such a dramatic expansion is having qualified staff and instructors to run the programming. We are fortunate that our staff are mainly our camper alumni, which is a key part of keeping our traditions alive and well summer after summer. To fully staff this dramatically larger waterfront with way more skill-based activities like sailing and skiing, we are bringing skilled talent from Great Britain, Australia, Israel, and beyond.

For many camps, it is common to have a third or half their staff come from abroad. For us, this will be new and a change in culture. We are working to create a welcoming environment and **you can help**. If you are able to provide a home base for an international staff member, please let me know. We need to add 20 host families for pre and post camp stays as well as days off by June...

Specialty Camps and Skill-building

Only 20% of Jewish kids attend Jewish camp. Sometimes affordability or accessibility issues are in the way; but sometimes, secular camps are just more exciting and engaging.

We're committed to being the camp of choice for Jewish kids and adding specialty camp options is a big piece of that puzzle.





Two years ago, we launched two specialty camp weeks - Teva Adventure, a wilderness week, and HUC, Herzl's Ultimate Clinic. Both are thriving and providing new opportunities to immerse in Jewish camping while trying something new or developing a skill.

With two great options established, we've added a specialty week in Mickey's Mitbach. Our **Mitbach Masters** will spend their days baking and cooking, even harvesting their own ingredients from Kibbutz Golda and Margie's Garden. I can smell the kugel now! (Or maybe Trace is whipping up breakfast...)

Look for more specialty weeks in the coming years. We want to grab the attention and excite our middle-school campers so they make Jewish camping their choice. We're working on a Makers Camp and Waterskiing next...

Thriving Judaic and Israel programming!

Let me take a minute to brag. As you know we've been investing a lot of time and energy into creating some engaging and innovating Judaic and Israel education curriculum. Many friends and skilled staff have worked hard to integrate Jewish learning into all aspects of chugim and daily camp life. We're not done, we still have ideas to put into practice, but boy, did we see progress this summer! And you noticed! In our end of summer surveys, 83% of our families gave our Judaic programming **5 out of 5 stars!**

Our curriculum focused the week's activities, study and prayer times, as well as daily camp activities like song sessions and flag raising, on lessons drawn from the upcoming Shabbat's Torah portion. This created shared experiences and knowledge like a "Community One-Read" program and allowed campers to come to Shabbat services with a sense of mastery over the text. More interesting and engaging services ensued!

In the "you can't win 'em all," challenge category, **we've got some work to do** on our Israeli Education program. Now, let me be clear, the program is knocking it out of the park! The work is that no one seems to know about it!

Here are some cool parts of the program:

Jewish National Fund joined us a number of times this summer to lead a **tree planting** activity. Campers planted trees, helping to reforest our grounds. In the process, they learned about Israel's agriculture, tasted some of Israel's



main produce, used a giant map of Israel to determine where Israel's trees grow, and learned about JNF's work in Israel.

Our **Israeli Camper Exchange** program continued to expand with past campers returning for a second year at camp. They were greeted by more than a dozen Israeli staff, led by a teacher from Israel - this quadrupled the number of Israeli staff contributing to our program. One fun result was adding popular Israeli music to our breakfast music and song sessions! Israeli dancing on Shabbat has a modern twist and the kids look forward to it all week.

This summer, we have a HUGE milestone to celebrate with three of our past **Israeli Campers coming back as Ozrim!**

Our American staff participated in a fantastic new program of internships in Israel prior to the start of camp. Coming straight from Israel to camp created an excitement to share their experiences with their campers and peers. Many more are signed up for the **Onward Israel Internship** program this summer!

So here's the challenge - even with all this dynamic, interesting programming and noticeably more Israeli experiences and educational programs happening in a planned and organic way at camp, this is the **best kept secret in town**. Our parent surveys showed that a quarter of parents didn't even know about our experiential education activities...Those that did know, thought it was just fair.

We're going to be working on more effectively sharing this story with you this year. In fact, if you want to get involved, let me know. I'm looking for some camp ambassadors to LOVE this program even half as much as we do!

Meeting parent needs

Over the years we've tried many things to meet our families' expectations for communications, photos, and camper communications - often with mixed results. Again this summer, we saw real progress... You might even say we hit the bullseye!

With the addition of a full-time social worker, pre-camp planning meetings, a full-time Family Experience Manager, and many daily and weekly communication tools, we saw our families' satisfaction level with communication jump 13 points and even **BEAT the national average** for Jewish camps by 8 points!

Another great change in communication is having our terrific year-round staff visit our main camper and staff cities in the off-season. We've been to



Kansas City, Des Moines, Omaha, St Louis, New Orleans, and Madison already this year and will be back around in the spring. I hope you take advantage of these in person opportunities to visit about camp and maybe introduce us to your friends. Again, **only 20% of Jewish kids go to Jewish camp**...we need your help to make a dent in that number!

Now, I'd like to see all of our parents give us 5 out of 5 stars on communication so we continue to strive for better. Look for some new tools to debut this summer and let us know what you think.

In the meantime, are you keeping up with **Drea Lear's Daily Director's Blog**? It's weekly in the off-season so look for it on Fridays and you can be in the know!

[Click here to check it out.](#)

A community-built camp

Everything at Herzl Camp is the result of passionate, dedicated alumni, parents, summer staff and community members. As an independent camp, we depend on you to make this dream real...

So let's dive in together! If you can host an international staff member or know someone who can, let me know. If you have ideas or concerns about camp, send them my way!

Maybe you'll spark the next innovation or solve a persistent problem. Or maybe we'll just have a good chat about our favorite place on earth...



So I've bent your ear enough about camp for today. I'm off to the movies with my family. Whether over lo mein or gathered around the tree with your non-Jewish loved ones, you have my very best wishes for a wonderful day with family and friends.

May the coming year find you and your family healthy and happy.

L'Shalom,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Gary', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Gary Kibort, Executive Director

P.S. - This is either a shameless plug or a helpful reminder... The early bird registration **discount ENDS on January 1**. So, maybe this is good day to sign up and save yourself \$25 per camper...

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