A YEAR OF HOPE

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GREAT THINGS ARE HAPPENING
MICHAEL KATZ — EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

As my first official year as Executive Director comes to a close, I can’t help but wonder where the time went. It was a year that saw so many special people step up and do amazing things, a year of landmark events beyond belief, a year of staff members assuming more responsibilities, a year of continued compassion from our many volunteers and most importantly a year of unbelievable courage from Camp Sunshine families.

The program gained some additional momentum with the help of new corporate donors, McKesson and Party City... both giving generously to Camp. We were also fortunate to be selected as the charity of choice of movie star Anton Yelchin, who will be playing Chekov in the new Star Trek movie. As Anton’s charity, Camp Sunshine will be a recipient of a portion of the proceeds from a fundraising contest by Omaze and Paramount pictures. The winner of the contest won a walk-on role in the new Star Trek movie.

Other awe-inspiring events included the SEALs for Sunshine event, in which four courageous Navy SEALs and one Coast Guardsman tackled a grueling 11-hour wacky reverse triathlon including a race down Mt. Washington for 7.5 miles, an 84-mile bike trek to Camp Mataponi (I was exhausted just following them in the Camp van!), and a 4-mile Sebago Lake swim to Camp Sunshine, where they exited the water to the cheers of adoring Camp Sunshine families.

Another test of endurance was Tropical Smoothie Café C.E.O. Mike Rotundo’s walk across Manhattan in flip flops. He pushed a smoothie cart and handed out smoothies to New Yorkers along the way, all to raise awareness and funds for Camp Sunshine. This event, in conjunction with Flip Flop Day and other Tropical Smoothie events, resulted in the record-breaking accomplishment of raising ONE MILLION DOLLARS... Thanks a million, Mike!

On the horizon... 2016 is already picking up where 2015 left off, with the “Cold Toes, Warm Hearts” tour. As Executive Director, I have the “cool opportunity” of celebrating the 10th Anniversary of Camp Sunshine Polar Dips by plunging in all TEN Camp Sunshine Freezin’ for a Reason events. Dips are planned from Virginia to Maine, and I am looking for anyone from the Camp Sunshine community who is willing to join me.

Another big anniversary is being celebrated, as the Migis Hotel Group, led by Tim, Joan, and Jed Porta, has pledged to raise $250,000 for Camp in celebration of Migis Lodge’s 100th Anniversary. They are planning to raise $2,500 for each year that they have been in operation. The Portas have and continue to be loyal supporters of Camp Sunshine! Plenty of great things are happening and plenty more are on the way... stay tuned!
When you talk about family at Camp Sunshine, it is not always about family that is biologically based, but rather of a community-based nature. Family at Camp Sunshine comes to mean the people you meet, who share and understand your story, who applaud your children in the context of knowing the strengths and weaknesses imposed by illness. Family is about the people who understand how much the diagnosis turns you upside down and inside out, and how it changes you forever, in a way that gives you a different perspective on life.

Families grow to care about each other at Camp Sunshine, in ways that are difficult to explain. A mother sits in the parents’ group and explains, through laughter and tears, her worries as the mother of a child with a brain tumor, her concerns about not always being able to be at her son’s side as he grows into a capable young man. A year later, in another group, phones start buzzing. The knowledge that something has happened in that child’s life, even hundreds of miles away, engages an unending network of support — one that starts in the parents’ group. A small ripple in the parents’ discussion group ignites an outpouring of concern.

Everyone who comes to Camp Sunshine wants or needs an avenue of support — and they often find what they need the most. Some people need to connect with their own family during their time at Camp, some people need to make a connection with someone else in the same situation, and yet others are interested in becoming part of a larger community. Whoever you are, Camp has bread enough shoulders that it can meet that need.

Going into my eighth year at the December Brain Tumor weekend, I started thinking about how nervous I was the first time I volunteered... how I didn’t know what to expect, wanted to make a good impression, and wanted to help people so much. By the end of the weekend, I was in love with Camp, had signed up for the February session, had plans to come back in the summer, and gained about fifty new Facebook friends.

I feel so lucky to be a volunteer here. I think people who have never experienced Camp think I’m performing some great altruistic act, but the truth is, Camp has changed my outlook on the world and made me a better person. I’ve learned what strength and bravery looks like up close. I’ve cried and laughed (and laughed till I’ve cried) with some of the best people in the world and any given day I would 100% rather be at Camp than anywhere else in the world.

I always say to my non-Camp friends that this December weekend is my holiday celebration with my Camp family before I travel back to New York and have holiday celebrations with “real” family and it couldn’t be more true. The opportunity to recharge and hang out and play some great games in the Teen Room is welcome time away at the beginning of the holiday rush!
JOIN US THIS WINTER & SPRING!

We are excited at the prospect of the 2016 season. The promise of the Winter and Spring sessions eagerly awaits. Please let all families who could benefit from a Camp Sunshine experience know about the program. Refer a friend today and visit our website to download an application!

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