

American Diabetes Association

Midicha campers combine fun with learning about themselves

By LORRAINE MCCLISH

Camp Midicha looks much as the same as any other camp. Youngsters are scattered in small groups over a large wooded area. White clapboard cabins are scattered about with paths that all lead to the lake.

"The swimming is the same. The canoeing, hiking, horses, campfires and nature trails are all the same as in any other camp. But our kids line up for their (insulin) shots twice a day," said Mike Malis, executive director of American Diabetes Association-Michigan Affiliate.

Camp Midicha takes its name from Michigan Diabetic Children's Association, which was a group of volunteers who worked to make the camp possible in its early years.

Spread over 710 acres in Columbiaville, the camp will host about 350 diabetic youth in Michigan before the summer is gone.

"THIS EXPERIENCE is very important for the first-timers," Malis said speaking of the six-year



Mary Lutz, a counselor at Midicha for the third consecutive summer, is flanked by her charges. She is a Southfield resident and a sophomore at Michigan State University who returns to the camp to help young diabetics, as she was helped.



Tim Fromm, a Bloomfield Hills resident and assistant camp director, gives tips for the

old campers as well as the youth who have been just recently diagnosed as having diabetes.

"For many it is the first time they have ever been away from home. Added to that, it might be the first time they have been on their own to care for themselves."

"The kids learn they are not alone with their problem. That's important. But maybe more than that they can show their parents they are not brittle dolls that have to be pampered." The camp's medical and program staffs zero in on making the campers' stay a fun time while still teaching the youngsters about themselves, their diabetes, their dietary and medical needs.

"Our medical staff never sleeps," said Bob Page, back to Camp Midicha for his sixth summer and now the camp director. "We have cases of homesickness in the middle of the night, same as any other camp, but that staff is on duty round the clock for any emergencies."

Page, who enters Michigan State University's Medical School this fall, draws the bulk of his staff and camp counselors from past campers who return summer after summer to help the young diabetic as they were helped.

Page couldn't answer why, but said a great many of them were headed for careers in chemistry, nursing or medicine.

CAMP MIDICHA carries a very relaxed air, in spite of the program that is heavy on sound nutritional and medical practices.

It is mandatory that campers use the buddy-system as a pre-caution taken for the first-time off on his own. It is also mandatory that campers participate in burn-off-the-energy activities after every meal. Even so, there are a host of options as to how this can be done.

It is also mandatory that campers eat exactly and everything that is served to them at each meal and each of the four snacks provided daily.

"And that applies to the counselors and the staff," Page said. "We don't ask them to do anything we don't do."

Rules for acceptance to Camp Midicha are the same for everyone without regard to race, sex, color or origin for the 6-16-year-olds.

Major contributor of campships has come from Michigan Elks Association, which has made it possible for hundreds of young diabetics to learn about themselves in the most enjoyable way.

"The most enjoyable way is more often than not by being with those who have the same problems at the same age that you do," Page said. "All of our campers are encouraged to attend the rap sessions

for an interchange of mutual problems with others of their same age.

"The kids are also encouraged to come to us with a problem. Our staff and all the facilities are set up to handle any change in an individual child's requirement that can't be predicted."

"Sometimes this comes from increased activity, or the emotional charge of new exciting things to do, whether related or not to diabetes."



The day we met John Stopchinski he was leading in the animal collecting contest with a couple of toads and a giant bullfrog. The West Bloomfield resident attends Abbott Middle School.



The buddy system teamed up Jim Jensen (at left) from Garden City with Jeff Baron from West Bloomfield for a session in pond study given by the forest rangers in La-

Peer. The youngsters are looking for scud, a crustacean of the shrimp family in Camp Midicha's lake.

Staff photos by Randy Borst



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