

Jesse's camps 2023

We begin camp week on a cold and rainy Monday morning with the new time change. Sleepy heads all are we! In spite of the chill and dark, we begin welcoming our youngsters at 7:30 a.m. Breakfast is ready and staff have schedules filled with great activities for the entire week!

My beloved Greg and I begin our day earlier than usual by loading the car with all the groceries Donna Dillon and I bought (thank you to all who contributed to her). It is our annual ritual to shop for fresh fruits, veggies, and snacks to supplement the food provided for camp week. Donna and Jesse had such a close bond, and every year Donna does her own fund raising for yummy things. It is a happy trip for us both, and we know the kids love it!

Huge thanks once again to City Commissioner Curtis Richardson for meeting with each of our youngsters at all 5 locations. His life story is quite inspirational. He describes growing up in a segregated Green Cove Springs, FL, in a family of 8 children during Jim Crow years when his parents weren't allowed to vote. He registered to vote as soon as he was able. His college years were when his interest in politics was piqued. Our youngsters are engrossed in his story and have so many questions for him. He encourages them to become voracious readers and talks about how reading takes you to new places and provides a wonderful education. Mr. Richardson's easy demeanor engages our youngsters especially when he tells them he can see the next President of the United States sitting in front of him and reminds them they can become whatever they hope to be. His message is captivating, and you could tell by the looks on our youngsters' faces that they get what he means.

Last year, Commissioner Richardson challenged our youngsters to read a book during Spring break. That seed of an idea led to inviting members of the Leon County School Board to come read books with us. We are so grateful to Darryl Jones, School Board Chair, and School Board members Rosanne Wood, Marcus Nicolas, and Laurie Cox for making time this week to read with us! Mr. Jones spoke passionately about reading and emphasized how when "you read, you begin to learn", and he cited how books can "make you happy, they can inspire you, and they take you to places you might not see." He asked each child the name of the book they are reading during Jesse's camp week. He returned at the end of the week with books for each youngster. A special thanks to Rosanne Wood for accepting my invitation to read and then encouraging me to invite all the School Board members. We live in an incredibly caring community where we all want our children to succeed and live the fullest life possible.

The Tallahassee Youth Orchestra joined us again this year because our youngsters loved them so much last year. Their "petting zoo" is the most clever creation. Their musicians bring instruments and play some tunes which are both classical and popular. I wish you could have seen their faces light up when they recognized the popular song. The "petting" part is the hands-on opportunity for each child to try to play each instrument with coaching from the musicians. A huge thank you to TYO for providing each youngster 2 tickets to an upcoming performance. What a wonderful way to inspire our youngsters and broaden their horizons or deepen an interest they already have.

Music therapist Jane Estrada also returned by special request. Jane has a magical ability to harness the energy of our kids and help them create a musical storm and then quiet the storm musically as well. They dance to the music and breathe calmly to other music. They play musical games. It is an incredible activity led by a gifted conductor. Thank you, Jane.

There were field trips again this year. One group went hiking at the Joe Budd reserve in Midway. Another group returned to the FSU Ocean Lab in Panacea which has become a favorite place to learn something new. There were also art classes, sports events, game time, cooking classes and so much more.

The main event that all 5 locations participated in together at Walker-Ford was Rodeo Day. Aeshah McQueen, Supervisor at Walker-Ford, has that gift of creating special events. There were indoor and outdoor events including horse rides offered by Redemption Farms (a sanctuary). There were stations for making smores and trail mix. Plus, Mary Allgire returned to teach the old-time dances and The Long Forgotten String Band played great tunes and taught the dancers about their instruments. On a very personal note, I thank my music group, The Elsinore Sewing Club, for being the warmup band!!! Huge thanks to all for such a memorable day and week.

I always hope that Jesse's camp week provides more than an exciting Spring Break week for our youth. I always hope that each youngster discovers something new to inspire them and make them more curious about our world. I think we accomplish that because the Tallahassee Parks, Recreation, and Neighborhood Affairs has staff who are dedicated to their work with our community, and they love working with our youngsters. I am grateful to Ashley Edwards, Director of PRNA, Bobby Sparks, Recreation Superintendent, and the supervisors of each of our community centers for all they do throughout the year and especially during Jesse's Camp week. They are a pleasure to work with.

As the week ends, I feel a deep satisfaction and gladness for what we together have accomplished. We receive so much support from so many. I know you know we are doing something so good in our community to enrich and empower our youth. I am so

grateful for having the opportunity to honor my beloved Jesse's memory in such a meaningful way. He would love this!

I invite you to visit our website to learn more about what we do.

<https://www.talgov.com/parks/JesseCorreiaMemorialScholarship>

If you wish to make a tax-deductible donation to our work, please send your check made payable to Friends of Our Parks/Jesse's camps to FOOP, 1201 Myers Park Drive, Tallahassee, FL 32301.

With a heart filled with love and gratitude,

Martha Weinstein

Jesse's mom