reflect

courage  honesty  integrity  faith

A Publication of Camp Highlander

Fall 2016

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A PLACE LIKE NO OTHER

Camp Highlander seeks to build boys and girls of courage, honesty, integrity and faith, and to help them become all that God intends them to be.

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g’night boys & girls!

“In 1993, I distinctly remember telling my wife Shelley on our way back home to Louisiana after a trip with our five daughters to Blowing Rock, North Carolina, that I felt we were headed in the wrong direction. “Home feels like it’s behind us,” I whispered to her, “in North Carolina.”

— Karl Alexander
“As it turned out, four other parties were trying to buy the camp at the same time. We waited and prayed and refused to stop dreaming.”

— Karl Alexander, Camp Owner

And it’s true. Camp has always been in my blood. As a boy, I attended camp in the Appalachian Mountains of western North Carolina. I loved it so much I kept going back for 10 years, returning as the riding director as late as my sophomore year of college at LSU.

Back then, when a young man should be thinking about forging a career and making a living, I wanted nothing more than to spend the rest of my life in camping and making a difference in campers’ lives. I wanted every child to be able to experience the magic of nature and the lifelong friendships that had captured my entire being during that segment of my life. Every part of me wanted to return to the mountains of North Carolina and spend the rest of my life in this pursuit.

But my dad had other plans for my life. In fact, when I told him on a late summer day in 1970 that I wanted to be a camp owner, he declared, without hesitation, “That is not a real vocation. You need to get a real job.” So, after getting my bachelor’s degree in business, I spent the next 30 years in real jobs — first as a banker, then as a car dealer, then as a commercial real estate broker, and finally, as the vice president of marketing for an international renewable energy company.

Still Dreaming

In 1993, I distinctly remember telling my wife Shelley on our way back home to Louisiana after a trip with our five daughters to Blowing Rock, North Carolina, that I felt we were headed in the wrong direction. “Home feels like it’s behind us,” I whispered to her, “in North Carolina.”

My very practical, dear wife proceeded to explain to me that my job, my means of supporting our family, was in Louisiana, and that our five girls were enrolled in schools in Louisiana, and that I needed to take a deep breath and keep driving west. But truly, it was one of those pivotal moments in a man’s life when I realized I was being called home to North Carolina.

From that point forward, I put a great deal of thought, prayer, and planning into our exodus back to the mountains. Then, in April of 1996, I got a call from the camp I attended as a boy informing me they were selling, asking if I would be interested. Being a former banker and keen on the “numbers of the deal,” I made an offer. But after months of dialogue and negotiating, it became clear we were not going to strike a deal. I was devastated.

Meanwhile, the signs that I was being called to work with children were becoming clearer. I launched a high school Bible study with one of my now son-in-laws and three of our daughters’ male friends, and the study quickly spread to five high schools in Baton Rouge. It got so big, we moved it into a YMCA, sponsored a fundraiser, and raised funds to build an entire new wing just for the youth.

Now or Never

As I approached 50 years old, I recall thinking, “This is it. It’s now or never.” So, I launched my plea with Shelley one more time, to buy a summer camp in North Carolina and move the entire family. This time, her response was different. I don’t know if it was just good timing, or if she was scared I was having a mid-life crisis, or if I’d just plain worn her down — but she said yes! We immediately hired a broker from New Hampshire to find the Alexander’s a summer camp in western North Carolina, never dreaming we would end up with a boys and girls camp the caliber of Camp Highlander.

“I WANTED NOTHING MORE THAN TO SPEND THE REST OF MY LIFE IN CAMPING AND MAKING A DIFFERENCE IN CAMPERS’ LIVES.”

— Karl Alexander
...IT ALL STARTED WITH A 10-YEAR-OLD BOY FROM A SMALL CAJUN TOWN IN SOUTH LOUISIANA, BEING SENT TO A CAMP IN TUXEDO, NORTH CAROLINA.

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Why did I insist on the tour? Originally, I had pictured us buying a single gender camp, because that was all I had ever known. Being the father of five daughters and a staunch disciplinarian, cool simply had never crossed my mind. So I insisted on the tour and on a sit down meal with all of the boys and girls. I remember that lunch like it was yesterday, and how comfortable I felt in that coed setting. It was the cabin unit culture and the family values that spoke to me in that lunch and you'll read more about it in this issue of Reflect.

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"CHIF" has become a big part of the culture and community here at Camp Highlander. Campers and counselors have adopted it as their own. They believe this is who they are, and who they want to become. At the end of camp, our goal is for them to be able to say, "You know what, I am more courageous, more honest . . . ."

— Melissa Fitzgerald, Director

Camp Highlander CREED
Camp Highlander seeks to build boys and girls of courage, honesty, integrity and faith, and to help them become all that God intends them to be.

COURAGE: Courage is found within you and is realized through the support and love of those around you. Dare to be brave. Try new things. Stand by your friends.

HONESTY: Be yourself. Honesty builds trust. Trust is the foundation of our family. Be kind to others, honesty is woven in our actions, not just words. Speak truth in love to your neighbor.

INTEGRITY: Be strong. Integrity builds confidence. Respect your peers, your elders and yourself. Lead by example. Win with integrity. Lose with integrity. Live a life of moral conviction, worthy of modeling.

FAITH: Believe. Seek joy in your life. Never stop dreaming. Faith is the ability to believe, find and make meaning in our lives. Faith is being certain of what is not seen and sure of what we hope for . . . experience the magic of Camp Highlander.

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Courage is found within you and is realized through the support and love of those around you. Dare to be brave. Try new things. Stand by your friends.

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Believe. Seek joy in your life. Never stop dreaming. Faith is the ability to believe, find and make meaning in our lives. Faith is being certain of what is not seen and sure of what we hope for . . . experience the magic of Camp Highlander.
As a member of the American Camp Association (ACA), Camp Highlander follows what ACA defines as the four areas of camper growth: mental, physical, social, and spiritual. All areas of our camp life and programming grow out of these four areas, and this is where ‘CHIF’ was born. ‘CHIF,’ of course, stands for Courage, Honesty, Integrity, and Faith. Those are the things we want campers’ lives to reflect while they are here, and long after they are gone. That’s one of the reasons we named our new magazine, Reflect. You hold the inaugural issue in your hands, and our prayer is that it serves as a warm and joyful reminder of the values and morals taught and lived out on this magical mountain.

Values...Lived Out

The values in the Creed have shaped the culture of Camp Highlander and are lived out in the daily camp life. Our cabin unit provides a place where children can fit in and feel loved just the way they are, while learning to be a better version of themselves as they seek to live out those values each day. Through our cabin unit, we focus on encouraging the heart and building the character of each camper.

We are humbled by the incredible opportunity to partner with parents as we help grow and shape their children into young men and women who will live out the Creed. Our counselors are hired based on the values of this Creed, knowing their responsibility to model these values and encourage them in each camper they have the privilege of working with. Through their role model example, counselors impact the lives of our campers and impact the camp experience by encouraging positive relationships, and healthy choices.

At Highlander, we seek to learn from our mistakes and to grow and improve each day. It’s the mindset that yesterday was good, but I am going to be even better today. I want to live as if I am winning my best each day. That’s what we expect from our campers. We want them to be changed from the inside out by the camp experience.

Wait . . . It’s Not About Performance?

While talent, accomplishments, and success are always celebrated for our campers, our priority has always been for every camper to strive to their own standard of excellence. It’s not about their skills, it’s about their hearts — which campers and parents find extremely refreshing.

Wait over 40 different activities and programs, there is a place for every camper to shine here. While the world demands so much from our children to perform, compete and achieve, Camp Highlander provides a refuge for campers to just be themselves, and be their best. Every one of them has some love to give and to share.

The Four Torches

Sunday night campfire has been a long-standing tradition at Camp Highlander. At each campfire, four Senior Campers, two boys and two girls, are chosen from our two oldest cabins to light the Creed Torches. These campers are chosen for best representing the values of the Creed that week. As young campers, you long for the day that you too might be selected to light one of the torches at campfire. The campers who light these torches feel a deep sense of pride as they are looked up to and respected as role models for the next generation.

Living it Out

‘CHIF’ has become a big part of the culture and community here at Camp Highlander. Campers and counselors have adopted it as their own. They believe this is who they are, and who they want to become. At the end of camp, our goal is for them to be able to say, “You know what, I am more courageous, more...”

You might see one of our campers lose a game against another camper, and approach the winner with an outstretched hand. “Good game,” the opponent says. “You played well. It was fun.” That’s so CHIF!

We witness CHIF lived out in most of our cabin units where campers are challenged daily to face fears and show courage, to speak honestly with their counselors and friends, to live with integrity as they make good choices, and to have faith as they seek to make meaning in their lives. As each individual strives to live a CHIF life, the cabin unit ultimately reflects the true spirit of Camp Highlander.” “That’s so CHIF!

CHIF all goes back to our family – Camp Highlander is Family. Our hope is that through the love and support of this family, each camper will reach new goals and exceed the expectations they have for themselves. We want our campers to take those values with them as they leave our mountain and seek to live the CHIF life each day.

As we seek to instill the values of our Creed at camp, we are humbled by the growth in our campers year after year. Thank you for entrusting your children to us and allowing us to do what we love and to impact the lives of others.

Make today better than yesterday, As good as you hope tomorrow will be, With courage, honesty, integrity and faith, As you live the Highlander Creed.
"IF YOU’RE IN MY CABIN, YOU ARE MY BROTHER/SISTER."

From the first day of camp to the final campfire, Camp Highlander offers a place for every camper to belong. Indeed, belonging is a vital and intentional part of the culture of Camp Highlander, and it all takes center stage within what we call our “cabin unit.” Ten happy campers, along with a minimum of two cabin counselors, make up each of our tight-knit girls or boys cabins. As a cabin family, the campers and cabin counselors set out for daily adventures, enjoy meals and exciting activities together, and explore the many nooks and crannies atop Old Forge Mountain.
The cabin unit is the key to the success of every camper at Camp Highlander. Unlike other camps where cabin staff members leave their campers in order to teach activities during the day, Highlander has dedicated activity counselors who are educated, certified, and passionate about their activity areas. Although we have to staff about twice as many counselors as they do at other camps, we think it’s worth it, because it allows our cabin unit counselors to remain with their campers throughout the day and evening, serving as role models, mentors, and friends in a tight-knit unit. This frees up our counselors to focus on building relationships, encouraging individual growth, and celebrating the uniqueness of every camper.

Within the cabin unit, campers are changed from the inside out. While personal accomplishments are valued and celebrated, this cohesive group focuses most on important life lessons about cooperation, respect, sharing, teamwork, problem-solving, and conflict resolution.

The cabin unit gives each camper nine brothers or sisters in their cabin family, all of whom team up to create a unique and positive support system throughout camp. Our core camp offers wonderful opportunities for campers to practice social and communication skills with their peers. For example, a girls cabin will call the cabin of boys of the same age their “brother cabin,” and counselors will consistently seek opportunities to encourage campers to treat their brothers and sisters with dignity, honor, respect, and integrity — whether it’s on the basketball court or at a camp dance.

At the end of a fun-filled week of camp, we all gather at the weekly Sunday night campfire to hear live music, sing our favorite camp songs, and enjoy the crackling fire. It is here that we wrap up the magic of the week and remind our campers and staff of the Highlander Creed they seek to live out each day at camp — and beyond. After lighting our four Creed torches — representing Courage, Honesty, Integrity, and Faith — we honor the six campers who modeled those values most throughout the week. These are our Honor Campers, a boy and girl leader from each division of camp: Junior Camp, Intermediate Camp, and Senior Camp.

While being an Honor Camper is an incredible individual achievement for any camper, the highest honor is to be recognized along with your cabin mates as an Honor Cabin. Each week our activity counselors vote on two Honor Cabins, each of which has displayed cabin unity, cooperation, and the Highlander spirit.

Teamwork is the ultimate goal of every counselor and every cabin unit. We take 10 different boys or girls from different families and backgrounds, and bring them together to learn and demonstrate teamwork, encouragement, support, compassion, and unity.
How well do we really know our children? What are their fears? What are their limits? If you already know the answers to these questions than feel free to skip the rest of this, but if you are interested in a way to find out, read on.

My wife and I are both military and spend a great deal of time not with our family. My wife was looking for a good way to connect with our daughter in a strong and long-lasting way. Through the miracle of TV a morning show gave her the idea of Family Camp. I thought of the price tag, the time it would take away from moving into our new home and the disruption of a routine we established after the move. However, my wife was insistent that we needed something to shake things up. Upon reading slogan after slogan, “Disconnect to reconnect,” this routine helped my children get over any of that fear.

The structured environment and constant diligence of the camp counselors made this one of the most worthwhile experiences ever for me. Truly, the first three years of my daughter’s life I was at sea a majority of the time. My wife kept a calendar, I did three detachments (3 to 6 weeks), one mini cruise for two months, and two back-to-back deployments for 8 months apiece. In the time between deployments, my boss sent me to school to attain another qualification. In the end, I calculated that I had spent a whopping 3 months and 9 days at home since my daughter’s birth four years prior. I needed to spend more time with my children, but like most of us, commitments pile up and you lose sight of the important things through all the stress.

We decided to trek away from the Hampton Roads area to North Carolina and attend Camp Highlander in Mills River. The welcome was so overwhelming that we could barely keep track of our luggage. The camp counselors descended on our vehicle like locusts picking our car clean of all luggage. The ladies that worked in the stable also set a high bar by teaching us both how to ride, and my daughters how to care for the horses. Horses are so big they can be very intimidating and this routine helped my children get over any of that fear.

Lastly, the food was fantastic and plentiful. The lady who took care of that ran a tight ship and stocked fantastic coffee (seriously, keep that coffee coming).

The camp counselors descended on our vehicle like locusts picking our car clean of all luggage and in a moment had it on a Gator headed to our cabin. At this point, my stress level dipped into nothingness and it was now easy to relax for the rest of the weekend.

“The camp counselors descended on our vehicle like locusts picking our car clean of all luggage and in a moment had it on a Gator headed to our cabin. At this point, my stress level dipped into nothingness and it was now easy to relax for the rest of the weekend.”
—Eric Zack

“disconnect to reconnect”

My youngest daughter, who is a demon on wheels and charges into any situation with little regard for safety — is intimidated in large group settings. Yes, she is capable and smart, but her personality changes when faced with a large group. I noticed this at camp because the group gatherings were sometimes large and each family had a role to play. My eight-year-old daughter is timid. I often worry about her, because she is a gentle soul, however she is actually a fierce competitor in everything from archery to Emitting. Not only that, she and a friend, whom she just met the evening before, volunteered to sing in front of the entire Camp a song from The Jungle Book.

Parents often only realize their children are starting to become independent when they begin to act differently, often by making poor decisions, in an effort to draw attention to the need for more independence. Camp Highlander gave my wife and I the opportunity to view our daughters through a fresh set of eyes, unencumbered by technology and distractions, and we liked what we saw. I can recommend Camp Highlander strongly. I recommend doing this for the sake of both family cohesion and overall sanity.
It’s no secret around Camp Highlander that when the sun goes down the energy turns up. Since the 1970s, when former Camp Director Gaynell Tinsley intentionally expanded and intensified the camp’s social nightlife, campers of every generation have fallen in love with our ever-evolving Evening Program (EP) traditions. But the nighttime escapades that have become such a staple of the Camp Highlander experience — from square dances and carnivals to talent shows, plays, and scavenger hunts — weren’t always as they are now.

By Adam Knechtel
At that time, most camps offered some sort of nightly entertainment, but it was usually sporadically scheduled and often only engaged a small portion of campers, while others watched and waited on the sidelines. Gaynell saw the need for an expanded set of evening programs, offered consistently every night, and designed to encourage participation from every camper and staff member on the mountain. He wanted to create something that would keep the camp atmosphere alive and in high gear at the end of each day. And so, armed with an energetic and enthusiastic staff that drew inspiration from every aspect of daily life, he began transforming the evening program schedule into the all-inclusive experience it is today.

Lighting up the Night
The transformation started bit by bit. One afternoon Gaynell attended a block party in downtown Hendersonville that featured an outrageously enjoyable square dance routine set to live music; the very next day, Camp Highlander hosted its inaugural Square Dance evening program. When Gaynell was impressed by the excitement and energy generated at a local carnival — with its myriad of food options, rides, games, and electric entertainment — he put his creative cap on and Monte Carlo Carnival Night was born at Camp Highlander. The Country Fair, Mr. Highlander Pageant, and countless other fun-filled events have followed over the years.

Interestingly, amid all the glitz, glamor, and exhilaration of the quickly expanding evening program, Gaynell never lost sight of the tried and true methods of the past. Firmly in place, he kept the camp-wide Talent Show that gave campers and staff the opportunity to showcase their abilities, and the ever-popular Cabin Challenge Night that pitted cabin against cabin while encouraging cabin unity amidst friendly competition.

The Best of Old and New
The more fun Gaynell and his staff had creating, expanding, and evolving the programs, the more fun campers had as the mountain came to life each night. Over the next four decades, even as the all-time favorites settled in place as staples, EPs continued to advance and adapt to the changing times. For example, innovations in technology have seen the voting process for the Mr. Highlander competition change from simply judging crowd volume and reaction, to include individualized, real-time results using wireless voting devices.

On other nights, changes in pop culture and modern society add a new twist to an old favorite, as evidenced by Cabin Challenges that no longer reflect the popular quiz-based television game shows of the 80s and 90s (Jeopardy, anybody?), but instead mimic the trendy world of current hit shows like Iron Chef and Project Runway.

Even year-to-year changes to the EP staff bring new flavors to old traditions as unique talents and abilities are brought to the table. This sort of dynamism and synergy doesn’t happen by accident. It’s an intentional approach that has become crucial to the success of every EP. It’s what allows our staff to provide a timeless and universal experience at Camp Highlander, even though campers and staff members are
THE RHYTHM OF CAMP
By Adam Knechtel

Early in the cool morning, with dew on the grass and mist in the air, before the sound of children laughing and playing rises up across the mountain, before the splashing and running and children laughing and playing rises up across the mountain, before the splashing and running and children laughing and playing rises up across the mountain, there is the toll of the bell for which we are all subconsciously waiting.

Before we gather for Refit @ the Rock, or Assembly, or any other important meeting in which wisdom and knowledge and encouragement are dispensed, it is the toll of the bell that calls us together and creates a sense of connection to our past.

Before our family-style lunch, at the end of a long day, before we gather for grace at dinner, and in anticipation of camp coming to life under the star-filled canvas of the night sky, is the toll of the bell that keeps us in rhythm and reminds us what to expect.

Before the ceremonious torches are lit, before the cracking of the massive campfire, before the strains of a guitar and the familiar melodies of our favorite songs, before the excitement of square dances and nightly carnivals and intense competition, it is the bell that ignites our hearts and the tradition of the camp bell one step further.

"Hold up...you've got our bell!" Not long after the unassuming yet impressive large cast-iron bell was moved from Highlands to our current location atop Old Forge Mountain in 1974, the bell tolled on the back road. It was not until the bell had previously been designated as the historic bell of the city of Highlands, it was meant as much to them as it did to the camp.

If we attempt to retrieve their bell, they offered to afford the purchase of a replacement bell, should Camp Highlander graciously agree to the exchange. A short while later, the deal was struck.

The city of Highlands returned home with its historic bell, while Camp Highlander got a new bell and carried on with its bell-ringing tradition for roughly 30 more years without pause. Then, in early 2009, just as the winter front released its grip on the Blue Ridge Mountains, Karl Alexander, the newest owner of Camp Highlander, had an idea. After having lost his father, Herbert Rives Alexander Sr., and his mother, Frances McCoy Alexander, just 22 months apart, Karl sought a way to honor their lives and legacy by taking the tradition of the camp bell one step further.

The Search is On Karl set out on a mission to find and purchase the very bell he could find, and he immediately set himself to researching virtually everything about bells. Every detail about the bell had to be perfect: the size, the shape, the style, the sound. At the time, he also decided that, in addition to honoring his parents, the new bell would acknowledge the lifelong dedication of Leigh B. Harris II — widely known as “Mr. H.” to those around camp — who was the original camp director following the sale of the Wax Mountain in 1964. Mr. H. Instrumental in establishing Camp Highlander in its current location over four decades ago, and still comes around camp every summer.

After weeks of research, try as he might, Karl could not find the exact bell he was looking for — and that’s when the flashbulb hit him. In all of his frantic bell-searching, Karl was drawn to his camp’s past. He spent those days spent growing up at a nearby summer camp. He recalled a mighty, cast-iron bell that sat proudly in the middle of camp. He remembered waking up each morning to its rich, deep, powerful tolls. He could still feel the resonating sound of that bell as he closed his eyes and imagined walking by it on his way through camp.

Inspired by the recollection, Karl contacted the director of his youth camp to arrange a visit. And, so, in the chilly winter air, he drove down to his childhood summer camp in Tennessee, North Carolina, parked his car just outside the front gate, slipped past the fence and hiked straight up to the bell tower. It was a walk tall and triumphant in the heart of camp. After a brief pause, Karl climbed up inside the bell tower until he reached the very top, sitting just below the enormous bell. It was even larger and more impressive up close than he had imagined. He ran his fingers over its thick, cast-iron exterior and measured the width of its base — an impressive 44 inches. This was it. His search had finally come to an end.

"I’d like to place an order” Karl placed a summer order with Brounsam’s Bells in Brooklyn, Michigan, for that exact antique bell. Fifty years later, just prior to the start of camp in the summer of 2009, a specially ordered, 44-inch-wide, one-ton Brounsam bell arrived at Camp Highlander with all of its antique trappings and mountings. Karl hired a local steel company to engineer a tower strong enough and sturdy enough to host the bell demonstrably into the sky. A short while later, Camp Highlander’s very own bell, dedicated to the memory of his mother and father, sat proudly atop the Leigh B. Harris II “Mr. H.” Bell Tower at the very center of camp.

Though the bell first tolled for Camp Highlander in the summer of 2009, in a very real way it has been ringing for us since the beginning of our journey nearly 60 years ago. And, whether on the mountain or in our hearts, it will continue to toll forevermore.
As parents, we grew up in a different time, a very different world. While we enjoy the conveniences of modern technology, we long for a different life for our children—a life free of the pressures of social media; a world where our kids can experience fun, play, and community without having to document it with a selfie; a place where our children can be stimulated and engaged by a simple conversation among friends. We long for a world that builds content and grateful hearts in our children.

At Camp Highlander, we give campers the opportunity to escape from all these pressures and experience true relationship. Removing the distractions of social media and the pressure of responding to texts, campers are free to discover themselves fully engaged in nature, new activities, friendships, and life-changing experiences that are technology-free.

Learning From One Another

The social scene at camp is very different from their world at home. As a coed camp, we believe there are valuable life lessons for campers to learn from their peers. At Highlander, we are growing young men and women to be respectful, polite, kind, outgoing, and socially confident. Our cabin unit creates a sense of family for all of our campers, and provides a comfortable environment for them to interact with their brother or sister cabin, while building respectful friendships and developing strong communication skills.

While most activities are single gender, our programming seeks to provide opportunities for positive social interaction between boys and girls that is relevant to their age and social needs. Younger campers are most comfortable with coed interaction that is based on play, so our junior campers enjoy special programming, like a slip-n-slide luau hosted by our Junior Camp head counselor. It is here that lessons like sharing, practicing patience, and putting others first are taught to our boys and girls.

Our intermediate campers enjoy coed interaction through competition and food. These brother-sister cabins might enjoy a late night ice cream party or making cookies together in our Kamper Kitchen. Other intermediate cabins might challenge their peers to a coed bombardment tournament. These activities provide a comfortable environment for social interaction and respect of the opposite gender.

Our senior campers have the highest need for coed socialization. At Highlander, we seek to meet those social needs with appropriate oversight and mentorship from our counselors through our Senior Late Nights or Senior EPs. Senior campers relish hanging with their peers at an Asheville Tourists baseball game, or the friendly competition of a late night out at the bowling alley. It is here that they learn by watching our staff model respectful coed behavior and build lifelong friendships.

Preparation for the Road Ahead

We believe that through our intentional programming, we are preparing our campers for the real world ahead. According to the American Camp Association, the co-ed camp more accurately mirrors everyday living and may better prepare campers for life, since the world is co-ed. This is why we exist—to build young men and women who are better people and better prepared for the road ahead. We are teaching them to smile and look one another in the eye when talking, to make others feel valued by using
their names, to show interest by asking questions, to respect others by avoiding gossip, to encourage one another through success and failure, and to be the friends that they want to have.

What this means is, at Highlander, we not only “teach” social connectivity, we start a trend in campers and counselors alike that lasts for the rest of their lives. That trend is the high value we place on positive, supportive, and loving social connections. These connections help boost a child’s self-esteem, as well as build character traits like grit, self-regulation, and emotional-social intelligence.

Our emphasis on the social needs of children intentionally increases the capacity for connection, friendship, and empathy. When this connected, respectful way of dealing with people becomes part of a culture, it changes the way our campers view themselves and their world.

Camaraderie is Key
At Highlander, we value camaraderie. There are very few places left in the world today where you can see 340 children happily walking, talking, laughing, and singing together, where they’re fully engaged, fully present, arms linked, with nobody looking down to check a phone. Because our campers have experienced this simple world, they long to return each summer to experience it once again.

At Camp Highlander we seek to do everything better. That’s right, better! We seek to build better boys and girls through positive role models and character building experiences. We seek to provide a better world than the one we typically live in. We expect better from our campers each day and each year, as they learn from mistakes and grow in confidence. And as we raise the bar for our campers, we watch them achieve greatness.

FAMILY MATTERS

MOTHER-DAUGHTER WEEKEND
What would you give to invest in the relationship with your daughter? How about a retreat to the mountains and an opportunity to get away for quality mother/daughter time and memories. These times you will share at Camp Highlander will be cherished for many years to come. Come enjoy fun activities like archery, canoeing and crafts. Grow closer as you challenge yourselves on the ropes course, zip line and the climbing wall. This is sure to be a memorable weekend.
September 8-10, 2017 – Rates $475/$150 for each additional daughter

FATHER-SON WEEKEND
The relationship between a father and a son is like no other. Dads have a God-given role to protect and provide for their families, and to teach their sons the life skills necessary to grow into honorable men. Don’t miss this unique opportunity to share in a fun, action-packed weekend with your son in the beautiful mountains of Western North Carolina. In addition to great activities like riflery, canoeing and challenge tower, you will also share teachable, bonding moments with your son that shape his life, and change your relationship forever.
June 2-4, 2017 – $475/$150 for each additional son

Please contact the camp office for more information about these exciting weekends.
Every year, without fail, the best and the brightest from all over the country return to Old Forge Mountain to provide yet another unforgettable summer for our campers. From our kitchen crew to our activity counselors, from our maintenance team to every last cabin counselor, it is our incredible and beloved staff that truly makes Camp Highlander ‘A Place Like No Other.’

Recently, we sat down with two of these amazing staff members who go above and beyond their duties to make Camp Highlander feel like home to the hundreds of campers we host every summer. Emily Ranft, a recent graduate of Ohio State University, where she studied early childhood education, is enjoying her first summer as Head of Junior Camp after several summers as a cabin counselor. Emory Klesick, a multi-talented and rugged outdoorsman, heads up our wilderness program; unofficially, he’s also grill master extraordinaire during our camp-wide cookouts.

Reflect: Why did you choose camping as a profession?
[Emily] I really enjoy helping kids learn and grow and develop their skills and self-confidence. Nothing provides that opportunity like camp.
[Emory] It’s such a unique work environment and I genuinely enjoy the people I work with. Plus, I continually have the chance to learn new things every single day.

Reflect: How do you spend your time during the off-season?
[Emily] Well, I just graduated from Ohio State earlier this year, so this summer I’ll be working as a residential counselor (sort of like a cabin counselor) for a special needs boarding school nearby.
[Emory] I work as a residential counselor (sort of like a cabin counselor) for a special needs boarding school nearby.

Reflect: When did you first arrive at Camp Highlander? What was your immediate reaction?
[Emily] I first started at Camp Highlander in the summer of 2012 and I knew right away that I was in for an incredible experience.
[Emory] I was confused a lot at first because I had never seen the camp before and didn’t know my way around. I was also impressed with how billy everything was.

Reflect: What is the funniest/most embarrassing thing that has happened to you while at camp?
[Emily] During orientation my second summer, every counselor had to perform a 60-second seminar to teach something to the group. I got assigned ‘brushing your teeth,’ so I faked my way through the entire process. When it came time to ‘rinse and spit’ into the sink, I forgot I was faking and actually spit all over the floor of the dining hall. It was awful.
[Emily] The day I was finally asked to ring the bell for Reflect at the Rock. I totally goofed it up and almost dropped the long, metal hook on the ground. Everybody saw it. I haven’t been asked again.

Reflect: In your opinion, what makes Camp Highlander unique?
[Emily] Most camps provide an alternative learning environment where children can grow academically and cognitively like they do at school. But, they also offer the chance for children to develop their interpersonal skills, physical abilities, and a sense of discovery. No camp provides such unique environments quite as well as Camp Highlander, and I think it’s because of our cabin units. Growing such strong bonds with cabin mates, cabin counselors and even our tiny counselors, creates an environment in which every camper is free to be themselves, to take risks, and to learn new things.
[Emory] I think our activity counselors really set us apart. We have an entire staff that is specially trained and specifically dedicated to a given activity. Only a very small handful of camps in the country have activity counselors, and we’ve got the best!

Reflect: How has your time at Camp Highlander impacted your life?
[Emily] I’ve learned more about working with others and working with children in my time here than from any of my college courses, seminars, or field experience. As a camp counselor, you’re their mom, their friend, their sister, their teacher, and their role model all at once. I’ve learned so much about how to help kids grow and achieve new things.
[Emory] It’s given me new goals in life, career motivation, countless new skills, leadership opportunities, and the ability to take on any new job with enthusiasm and confidence.

Reflect: What is it about Camp Highlander that feels like home to you?
[Emily] The people — new faces and old friends alike. When you’re here, you’re family.
[Emory] My fellow staff members. I grew up in a family where I didn’t have much contact with extended family members. Highlander has helped fill that void over the years.

Reflect: For any parent that is hesitant about sending their child to camp, what would you say?
[Emily] I think most parents are worried about who is going to be there for their child when they can’t be. At Highlander, the answer is everyone! Cabin mates, cabin counselors, activity counselors, and our leadership team all work to support every single camper. Kids need to be able to grow in their independence and their self-confidence away from home, and we provide the best environment for that growth to happen.
[Emory] I would tell them it’s perfectly normal to feel that way, but to know their child is going to be in a caring environment where the goal of every staff member and counselor is to make sure their child feels safe and included.

Reflect: What is the piece of advice you would give to younger campers and staff members on how to make the most of their time here?
[Emily] Make the effort to meet new people. Don’t just stay comfortable with who you know. You’ll never have the chance to be with this specific group of people ever again.
[Emory] Give everything a shot, even if it’s way outside of your comfort zone. You might be surprised to find out what you’re talented at. Camp is the perfect place to practice all sorts of skills because the number one goal at the end of the day is simply to have fun.

Q&A

“I think most parents are worried about who is going to be there for their child when they can’t be. At Highlander, the answer is everyone!” — Emily Ranft
Our five departments of programming and activities — Wilderness, Sports, Arts, Waterfront, and Equestrian — offer exciting new opportunities for campers each year. In the past five years alone, boys and girls have been introduced to canoeing, lacrosse, climbing overnights, our new Crows’ Nest ropes course, Native American crafts in Flint Knapping, constructing works of art in GlassWorx, and much more.

Our campers have the opportunity to explore more than 40 activities during each session here at Highlander. While travelling from activity to activity as a cabin unit provides our campers with a strong support system, our staff is always there to guide and encourage. Our goal is to ensure that every camper leaves Highlander with a sense of accomplishment and new memories.

Anyone who has experienced a stroll around Camp Highlander, virtually any time of day, can attest to the fact that one thing stands out above all others — our robust activities. Everywhere you look on Old Forge Mountain there is something incredible to witness, spark curiosity, and try out for the first time. For almost 60 years, Highlander has focused on developing new programming at the highest level to remain at the forefront of all residential camps. At the same time, we work tirelessly to hang on to the rich traditions that Highlander alumni have enjoyed since our founding.

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Camp Highlander is one of the only camps in the country to offer Flint Knapping, the age-old art of making arrowheads and other edged stone tools.
network and an incomparable level of teamwork, we’ve also made it a priority to cater to the individual interests of each camper, allowing them to schedule their own activities twice each week.

Wednesdays and Saturdays are known as ‘Camper Choice Days,’ reserved for extreme and advanced programming that give campers more options for progression in a particular program. For example, our climbing program takes campers rappelling down waterfalls; our paddling program brings young boaters down the Green River for entry-level whitewater; and the arts department focuses on creative new ways to spin its many different disciplines into exciting trips and projects. Camper Choice Days pack more fun and adventure into one day than anyone can imagine!

Tapping Into Nature
The awe-inspiring and adventure-filled landscape of western North Carolina provides the backdrop for many of our favorite and most traditional activities. Our campers boat, bike, and hike through Pisgah National Forest, and build friendships while talking and laughing into the night around campfires and sleeping under the stars. We climb, horseback ride, and raft through some of the most beautiful national forest land anywhere, giving our campers a one-of-a-kind view of God’s creation, while also challenging each other to overcome our fears and conquer our greatest challenges. These rollicking and timeless activities — and many more — keep us in touch with the traditional side of Camp Highlander, while at the same time we work diligently to create new programs in order to make things fresh and exciting for campers each summer.

The most well known programs in Highlander’s arsenal are without a doubt our evening programs. Every night, the entire camp comes together for a variety of fun, sometimes wild, always uplifting events, from cabin challenges and square dances to carnivals and scavenger hunts — and these barely scratch the surface of the many great evening programs that have made summer nights at Highlander so iconic.

Knights vs. Devils
Of course, no event comes close to delivering the excitement and tradition of our world famous Color War (well, maybe not world famous, but to us it’s a big deal). The war between White Knights and Red Devils is as old as the mountain itself. Once on a team, campers know they belong to that color — for life!

Be it Color War or canoeing, arts and crafts or archery, horseback riding or zip-lining, all of our programming exists to ensure that boys and girls have the most wonderful time of their lives while also helping them live out the characteristics of the Camp Highlander Creed: Courage, Honesty, Integrity, and Faith.
The ultimate goal is for every camper to feel accepted in his cabin unit as a member of the family, and to freely experience all that Camp Highlander has to offer. Ensuring each camper’s emotional and physical safety play a critical role in helping us achieve this goal.
The greatest joy in my role at camp is speaking with parents, learning about their children, and making sure they have a safe, healthy experience while they are here. Behind every parent is a story of their child and their journey to grow a little boy or girl into a young man or young woman. At Camp Highlander, we are privileged and blessed to partner with you on this journey as we seek to meet the needs of your children and give them memories that last a lifetime.

A Safe and Peaceful Place
Every Highlander parent is concerned with the emotional needs of their camper, and it is my joy to reassure them and explain our commitment in these delicate matters. Through continuing education and professional training, our staff diligently prepare for challenges that will occur during the summer, such as homesickness, socializing issues, and other common challenges. With the help of our counselors, campers learn more about themselves and how to better handle obstacles in their future.

At Camp Highlander, physical safety is at the forefront of every activity. We have maintained the highest standards of safety through our facilities, programs, and qualified staff for almost 60 years. We are ACA (American Camping Association) accredited and receive safety inspections by industry professionals each year. We also have an internal Safety Council, comprised of 10-12 staff members, which meets weekly throughout the summer to discuss and address various safety concerns throughout the camp property in order to create the safest environment possible for our campers.

Caring for Every Camper
We provide a caring, qualified health care staff of registered nurses 24 hours a day to tend to the needs of every child while away from home. The central focus of the Highlander health care staff is the good health of every boy and girl. The staff administers daily medications and provides professional health care and treatment for any camper or staff member who needs it. Although we hope your child will never have to visit our Health Hut, we are committed to communicate with you as a parent in the event medical attention is needed, that could affect your child’s camp experience.

Another intentional way we care for each camper is to be attentive to his or her individual nutritional needs. Many parents call with concerns because their child has a dietary restriction or allergy. Food allergies and the need for special diets increase each year, and the Highlander leadership team works closely with parents to make sure all allergies and dietary concerns are managed during the summer.

As a parent, one of the greatest acts of faith you can take is entrusting your child into the care of someone else. Your number one concern is our number one priority — the emotional and physical safety of your child. Many parents confide in me their fears about whether their child might have separation anxiety, trouble fitting in, or adjusting to making new friends. These are common concerns as parents long to build independence in their children and place them in an environment that will foster resilience. Camp is the perfect place for this to happen.

“At Camp Highlander, we are privileged and blessed to partner with you on this journey as we seek to meet the needs of your children and give them memories that last a lifetime.”

—Beth Lynch, Administrative Director
Since Camp Highlander first opened its gates nearly 60 years ago, thousands of people have come to call the mountain their home. Generation after generation finds their way to camp, soon discovering that the mountain means much more to them than they ever could have imagined. Perhaps no one has experienced this truth to a deeper degree than our very own Alan Levine.

**Spread Your Wings**

Alan first arrived at Highlander in the summer of 1976 as an eight-year-old boy ready to take on the world. But, due to a self-proclaimed lack of athleticism and a less-than-graceful demeanor, camp was not an easy experience for him. When he failed to master a new skill, like water-skiing, on the first and second (and third and fourth and fifth attempts), his counselors stood by his side and refused to let him quit. When Alan and his cabin mates found themselves stranded in the wilderness on an overnight hike, rain soaking them to the core, without a dry morsel of food to ease their sorrows, his counselors turned the misfortune into a valuable lesson of staying tough and resolving to overcome whatever difficulties and obstacles life might throw at you.

"Those were huge moments for me," Alan reflects. "Some of the things I remember most about my days as a camper were the hardest and toughest times I encountered on the mountain. Those were the moments that challenged me and gave me and allowed me to achieve what I hadn't achieved before."

Alan still remembers loading up in the camp bus with all of his cabin mates and counselors and heading off into the wilderness for another overnight camping trip. Halfway through the drive, one of his counselors singled him out and put him in charge of the fire duty — collecting all the wood for the camper, starting the fire, and maintaining it.

"It took me by surprise to know that he had enough confidence in me to put me in charge of something like that," Alan recalls. "And I took it seriously. His confidence gave me confidence, and I began applying that to other areas of camp as well."

Every individual who has the opportunity to live the Camp Highlander life as a youth, takes a little slice of Old Forge Mountain with them when they go. And they take our Creed with them, too — because it's become an integral part of who they are. In each issue of Reflect, ‘Forge On’ takes a glimpse at a different Camp Highlander alumni — and how they are impacting our world.

Pay it Forward

Year after year, Alan returned to the mountain and slowly developed into an incredibly capable young man. Each summer an amazing set of counselors and staff took him in, challenged him, and encouraged him. When he aged out of attending camp as a traditional camper, Alan naturally transitioned into a staff member and approached each summer with the same intentional desire to help other campers grow in their abilities and in their realization of who they truly were.

"Paying forward some of the care and instruction that he had received from his counselors, Alan purposefully sought out every opportunity to build up the younger campers around him. When other counselors met together to relax and unwind after lights out, Alan visited random cabins to chat with campers, to learn about who they were and what they enjoyed, to better understand what they were afraid of and what they hoped to accomplish."

"Sometimes I’d just sit in the cabin quietly, and listen to the boys talk to each other about their days,” Alan says. “I realized that every single kid there had a story unique to himself, and that time spent listening to them was invaluable as I got to learn all about their successes and failures and desires and dreams and hopes for the coming days. I could then use that information to better connect with them, to challenge and encourage them, to help them grow into the person they wanted to become, and to achieve the things they wanted to achieve.”

To Alan, it wasn’t enough for each camper to simply have fun on the mountain for a couple of weeks. He wanted them to be inspired, to grow, to overcome, and to head back home better than when they arrived. He wanted them to learn something new about themselves and to be unswervingly authentic — to throw aside any worries about needing to fit in.

**A Lifetime of Caring**

As the years passed, though he eventually aged out of camp life altogether, Alan took every lesson he ever learned from his time on the mountain and applied it to his own professional career — and what a career it’s been. He served as deputy chief of staff and senior health policy advisor to then governor of Florida, Jeb Bush. He also served as senior health policy advisor to then Louisiana governor Bobby Jindal. He’s worked as president and CEO of some of the nation’s largest health systems, overseeing tens of thousands of employees at any given time. All the while, through the immense success and influence he’s enjoyed throughout the years, he continually taps into the lessons he

**Current BIO**

Name: Alan Levine
Hometown: Atlanta, GA
Occupation: President and CEO of Mountain States Health Alliance
Summers spent at Camp Highlander: 17

"The most important thing I learned was how to be an effective leader and how to inspire people. It all comes down to caring enough about people to get to know them personally, to learn their stories, to understand what they care about, what they’re interested in, what they want to accomplish—and to inspire them to achieve it."

— Alan Levine

Left: Alan with President George H. W. Bush, as he receives recognition at the Bush’s home in Kennebunkport, Maine, for his service on the Board of the Barbara Bush Foundation.

Above: Alan traveling with his wife Laura.
smoke wafting between the familiar, rustic fragrance of innumerable pine trees; the voices and laughter of joyful campers erupting somewhere off in the distance. A welcome solace settles over him, as if the mountain itself is shielding him from all that transpires back in the real world. He takes a deep breath, knowing everything will be perfectly fine. Then he heads back down the mountain to spend time with the Camp’s single most important resource — its people.

Alan has come to realize, as everyone does who has spent any time on the mountain, that Camp Highlander is far more than a collection of buildings and camp amenities sprawling across 240 acres of pristine North Carolina wilderness. It is a close-knit community of people from all walks of life who find themselves happily at home every summer under the shadow of Old Forge Mountain; people who are different and better because of it.

Alan senses an irreplaceable bond and an unshakeable feeling of belonging with the Camp Highlander family. He, like many others, have come to understand that, no matter where you’re from, or where you’re going, or what you’ve accomplished, or what you still dream to achieve, the moment you set foot on the mountain, you have forever joined the Camp Highlander family. And, as Alan Levine can attest, that might just be the most incredible gift you ever receive.

Alan, along with his wife, Laura, son Terry McGowan, daughter Katy McGowan, at the top of Pike’s Peak. Both children were campers at Highlander.

“Those were huge moments for me. Some of the things I remember most about my days as a camper were the hardest and toughest times I encountered on the mountain. Those were the moments that challenged me and grew me and allowed me to achieve what I hadn’t achieved before.”

—Alan Levine

Do you miss the smell of roasting marshmallows or the sound of music by the campfire? Then join us for the 2017 Alumni reunion! Forget about work, disconnect from technology and enjoy the simple pleasures of camp again. Plan to relax and enjoy the view while painting, or conquer your fear as you fly down the zip-line or just sharpen your aim at archery. Reunion Date: 8/24-8/27 – Cost $395

To register or receive more information, please contact the camp office.

The 4th of July Celebration at Camp Highlander is always a wonderful time of competition, delicious barbecue and fireworks! Highlander Alumni are invited to join us on this special day as we celebrate our nation’s birthday and Camp Highlander’s 60th Anniversary!

There are new memories to be made and fun awaiting you on July 4, 2017.

Please contact the camp office to RSVP and for more information about the celebration.