



Thursday, July 23, 2009

## Camp Rosenbaum founder honored at Camp Rilea ceremony

*Brigadier general inspires Northwest youth to lead positive lives*

**By KATIE WILSON**

The Daily Astorian

Thursday, July 23, 2009



**KATIE WILSON** — *The Daily Astorian*  
Reba Strickland, one of the first kids at Camp Rosenbaum years ago, hugs founder, retired Brig. Gen. Fred Rosenbaum, and tries to tell him just how much his camp changed her life.

WARRENTON - Past and present joined together Wednesday to honor the man whose camp has influenced the lives of roughly 6,500 Oregon children during the last 39 years.

The Garden of Gratitude at the Rilea Armed Forces Training Facility in Warrington was dedicated in honor of Brig. Gen. Fred M. Rosenbaum, 83, who founded Camp Rosenbaum at the facility in 1970 for "at-risk" youth ages nine to 11. More than 100 people marked the occasion.

There weren't enough chairs at the ceremony and many people stood in a half-circle on the wet lawn outside the original Camp Rosenbaum clubhouse. Former Oregon governors Barbara Roberts and Vic Atiyeh gave speeches, as did Maj. Gen. Raymond F. Rees, adjutant general for the Oregon National Guard, and Arnie Leppert, former camp director. Father Rick Sirianni, chaplain with the Oregon National Guard, gave the invocation.

They spoke of Rosenbaum's perseverance, his dedication, and his love.

"Fred M. Rosenbaum, Oregon hero," said Roberts.

Rosenbaum's wife, Jane, and his two children, Mark Rosenbaum and Lori Krasnowsky, and grandchildren Sara, 22, and Hanna, 10, were also present.

The camp's past was represented by Reba Strickland, who was among the first group of kids to attend the camp when it opened in 1970. She came from a foster home in Portland.

"He will never realize how much he's changed people's lives," said Strickland, 53, a former nurse at Providence St. Vincent Medical Center. "This camp was the center of my hope."

She knows first-hand the dangers that many of the kids face. Her son, Isaiah, was murdered in 2003. "They need to be encouraged," she said. "This camp gives you the sense that you can do anything, that you have another avenue."



**KATIE WILSON** — *The Daily Astorian*  
Eleven-year-olds Ileah Lundin (lower left) from Salem and, from left to right, Adreanna Velazquez, Jalena Campbell and "Bella" Motley (all from Portland) met at Camp Rosenbaum.

The week-long camp hosts kids from housing authorities across Oregon. This year there were 174 kids, the second largest camp yet. The counselors are police officers and National guardsmen in disguise. They get to know the kids without the barrier a uniform can present. As the kids attend classes and go on field trips, counselors work to instill positive pictures of authority and citizenship. Ultimately, though, the goal is to get them behaving like the nine, 10, and 11-year olds they are.

As odd as it sounds, this is something many of the kids have to learn.

"Every single one of these kids has family issues. They come to camp with their own baggage," said Sgt. Bob Gorgone, 46, of the Portland Police Bureau, a counselor at the camp for 16 years.

"Within two days, you see their tough attitudes melt away." Yesterday, everyone could see the camp at work. The kids were laughing and screaming, chasing each other, grabbing each other's hands. They followed the counselors' leads: showing affection with hugs and smiles.

"The kids here are shown so much love," Strickland said. "This camp is a wonderful hope."

All of his life, Rosenbaum's lost childhood has chased him. He was 12 years old when the Nazis came to Austria and he had to flee the country with thousands of other Jewish children. He grew up fast.

He moved to the United States in the 1940s. His life here has been dedicated to giving kids their childhoods. The camp was bursting with energy and affirmation and Rosenbaum was at the center of it all on Wednesday. "I want a promise from you," he said to a room full of campers and visitors. He asked the kids to stand with him and made them recite after him: "I will stay in school and I will graduate from high school."

As the campers filed past him later, some saluted him by stretching out their hands, waving their fingers.

He made speeches, talked with counselors and kids, smiled at everyone, and welcomed the steady stream of handshakes and hugs from people who came to him with tears of gratitude in their eyes.

"It's far beyond anything I could ever imagine," he said quietly, looking around at the facilities and the people. "But," he added, a smile flashing across his face, "I want to take it one level higher."

His goal is working with organizations in Oregon to find a way to have the mentoring and affection to continue beyond a single summer week.

For all his energy throughout the day, many people couldn't have realized that just a few weeks ago Rosenbaum was at "death's door," according to Jane Rosenbaum. But he was determined to make it to the camp's visitor day.

"He told the doctors, 'I'm going to make it there, so you keep me here so that I can do that,'" said Jane Rosenbaum. "I had no doubt whatsoever that he would."

"People love him so much," she said after the garden dedication. She couldn't stop smiling. "It is amazing and awesome. It's unreal."

Camp Director Lt. Col. Donna Prigmore said Rosenbaum has been a mentor to her for years. "Today was an emotional day because I know he's not well," she said. "He's shown me courage and conviction and how to have determination in all that I do."

The exuberant girls and boys, scuffing at the chair legs impatiently in Gorgone's gang prevention class, ready to bust with excitement and energy, are perhaps the best proof that Rosenbaum's dream is succeeding.

Bella (the nickname she says she goes by at camp and at home) Motley, 11, of Portland said the best thing about camp was the friends she'd made. She grabbed her new friend Ileah Lundin, 11, of Salem, and wrapped her arms around the other girl's shoulders. "She's my 'Monkey!'" she laughed.

## Related Links