

FROM FATHER TO SON

Gate Hill Day Camp Thrives on History, Grand Experiences and Family Care

By Teresa Tobat



Photos courtesy of Gate Hill Day Camp

IF THERE'S ONE THING TO KNOW about Gate Hill Day Camp, is that it's a family affair. It's been that way for more than 20 years. And based on a generation of great experiences, the principals of the camp, who feel that they have the mix just right, intend to keep it that way.

Co-owner and co-director Bob Male cherishes his memories of being a young camper, and each summer he and his family look to

ensure that Gate Hill kids, when they look back years later, have similar experiences.

"The most important thing a camper needs," Male said, "is a sense of friendship and having new experiences."

Male's wife, Jennifer, is co-owner and the creative director for the Arts & Nature program. And along with their 30-year-old son, Josh, the trio have developed a program that strives to instill campers with kindred values.

Gate Hill, which has been in business since 1989, is a 33-acre camp in Stony Hill, N.Y., located on the west side of the Hudson River about 25 minutes north of the George Washington Bridge. (That's not to be confused with the town of Stony Point, which is just a few minutes away.) Gate Hill accommodates kids from age 3 up to those entering the 10th grade the following September. In addition to a range of athletics, the arts—which include cartooning and digital photography—are also offered. Schedules are flexible and are tailored to match group interests, and the activities range from baseball to soccer to basketball, and rocketry to robotics.

Campers depart from New York City at 8 a.m. and camp gets underway an hour later with "Gate Hill Gathering," a daily ritual at which the entire camp gathers to emphasize the spirit of community. At 9:30 a.m., campers begin participating in eight 45-minute periods of activities, which include two swim sessions daily in one of the camp's four heated pools. A nutritious half-hour lunch is served during a day that concludes at 4 p.m., and kids are back in the city around an hour later, depending on traffic and weather conditions.

Participants are divided into groups according to age. While younger children have planned schedules, older campers are allowed to pick electives based on the groups' collective interest. Thursdays are devoted to special events, like a carnival, a variety performance stage show and a "Dance Dance Revolution" bash, involving 50 kids at once and a really big video screen. Look out!

Gate Hill employs 175 staffers to manage the needs of 550 campers. With at least two counselors for the average-sized group of 12-14 kids, it's a nice ratio that allows counselors to provide individualized attention. That kind of focus can make things memorable.

"It only takes one 30 second interaction to change a camper's summer," said Josh Male, also a co-owner.

Jay Frankel, a camp consultant who has worked on the premises with Gate Hill for nearly a decade, said he appreciates the family owners' commitment to their customers.

"This is so much more than day care," Frankel said. "This is for parents who want their children to emotionally and socially grow as well as learn amazing skills and make amazing friends."



Gate Hill Day Camp runs from June 20 to August 20. Transportation is provided to and from Manhattan, and camp registration, which closes June 29, is done on a rolling basis. Parents can choose between sessions of a minimum of four weeks, and up to a maximum of eight weeks, with a 5 percent discount given for siblings who register together.

And for those parents who want to check out the camp before enrolling their kids, families are welcome to visit Gate Hill on August 7 during the annual preview day, known as Camp Saturday. Registration for Summer 2011 begins during the last week in July.

One of the things that Bob really enjoys about the camp is that he won't eventually have to sell his business, as Josh will soon take over. And he's as pleased as his dad that Gate Hill will remain a family-centered institution.

"It's a very special place in situations where a camp is really run, and thought through," Bob said. "It's like a Disney experience."

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