

HISTORY NOTE: Campers have had 'confidence' in Brainerd area outpost



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Half a century of service is marked this year by Camp Confidence/Confidence Learning Center, an outdoor center for people with a wide range of disabilities.

A 50th anniversary celebration was held earlier this month at the facility at East Gull Lake near Brainerd. Events included the burial of a time capsule containing pictures and items from the camp's first five decades.

The outdoor center serves people with developmental and cognitive disabilities, as well as people with hearing disabilities. It has special programs for children with fetal alcohol syndrome, and a program for children who have suffered the loss of a loved one.

Camp Confidence began when Dick Endres, a small group of local business people and others from the Brainerd State Hospital formed the Minnesota Therapeutic Camp, Inc. in 1967. Endres had worked at the state hospital since 1959, and soon began his pioneering work in the field of therapeutic recreation for people with developmental disabilities. He and other Camp Confidence founders believed that everyone has the right to experience life to the fullest. It was at a time when other specialized camps for people with disabilities were starting around the state.

The corporation purchased 140 acres of land on Sylvan Lake with brushing and clearing beginning in April 1969. Tent camping equipment was purchased to provide for eight campsites. The local unit of the U.S. Army Reserves assisted in the construction of a road access into the property as well as development of the main beach area and ski hill. The reserves later built picnic shelters, the nature playground and a timber trestle bridge.

The first cabin was built in 1971. That was followed by a ski chalet, more cabins, bathhouse, storage facilities, wilderness area, family camping area, Confidence Course, pioneer camp and Les Kouba Wildlife Center. One huge addition was in 1997 when the large Mariucci Lodge opened its doors. It honors hockey legend and longtime Camp Confidence supporter John Mariucci. It houses a nature center, woodworking, arts and crafts, camp store and offices,

along with two large meeting/activity rooms.

The 140-acre camp has enjoyed the support of many individuals and groups dedicated to improving the lives of people with disabilities. The camp includes nine cabins of varying sizes. It provides campers with a wide range of activities and outdoor experiences, including archery, canoeing, cross-country skiing, fishing, arts, crafts and woodworking. Campers can spend time with family, direct support staff or with fellow residents of their group homes.

One trend noted is that as people with disabilities live longer lives, the center has had to adapt and change to meet the needs of older campers. Today, Confidence Learning Center continues its mission, serving more than 11,000 camper days a year. A self-supporting facility, Confidence Learning Center operates successfully without the aid of government grants or programs.

Access Press is interested in reader submissions for the monthly History Note column, to complement the articles written by Luther Granquist and other contributors. Submissions must center on events, people and places in the history of Minnesota's disability community. We are interested in history that focuses on all types of disability topics, so long as the history has a tie to Minnesota. We are especially interested in stories from Greater Minnesota. Please submit ideas prior to submitting full stories, as we may have covered the topic before. Contact us at access@accesspress.org or 651-644-2133 if you have questions. The History Note is a monthly column sponsored by the Minnesota Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities.