

THE TOWER

YMCA Camp Kern Alumni Newsletter



FROM THE OFFICE OF TODD BRINKMAN

Greetings from the beautiful fall views that can be seen all around Camp Kern right now! The temperatures have dropped, and the camp is filled each week with a combination of school students and group rentals, along with the whirl of folks zipping across the Little Miami amidst the colorful leaves with Ozone Zipline Adventures. Summer already seems like a long time ago, but WOW, did we have an amazing Summer Camp 2023! Over the past two years, there have been multiple new faces in some key leadership roles at Camp. It's been a combination of people brand new to Kern (myself among those) and familiar folks who have stepped into new roles. This means a lot of learning has been happening – for each of our own jobs, as well as how we all work together for our beloved camp. I want to take this opportunity to say just how humbled and proud I am to work with the team we have at Camp Kern. It has quickly gone from being my new job with a million challenges to our home (still with a million challenges) where we are a community of diverse individuals coming together for the mission of our Y and our camp, and all who come to share in the experience.

Over my past 25+ years in camping, one of my trademarks has been growing the volunteer base. My approach to leading Camp Kern is no exception. I believe strongly that when our alumni and volunteers are engaged, this sparks new life into camp. My first camp volunteer workday was in April 2022, within the first couple of weeks of my arrival. We had 11 volunteers come to camp for a Sunday Workday (half of them were my family). Fast forward to April 2023, and we had over 60 volunteers come to camp and work to kick-start our summer program - it was amazing! I want to CHALLENGE Kern Nation as we continue to grow in opportunities for alumni and friends of Kern to come volunteer. I want to have at least ONE HUNDRED alumni, volunteers, and friends join the fellowship and fun while we work, for our Spring 2024 Workday on April 6th, 8:30 am – 5:30 pm. We will pause for a midday lunch, and the event will conclude, as all great days of work do, with a Kern Family Meal.

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From the Office of Todd Brinkman, *Continued*

One of the major projects for this spring involves our pool and surrounding area. After so many years providing joy and excitement to camp, our pool now needs some love and attention. The Dayton Y is purchasing a brand-new pool liner, which will stop the leak, currently losing 6,000 gallons of water a day. That will make it easier for the sun's warmth to make more of a difference to the pool's temperature for our campers and staff. Additionally, we plan to paint the bathhouse, install places for campers to put their shoes, add in a Water Wall of games, new lifeguard chairs, and paint the fence. Please tell a friend and bring your work gloves – what a great way to give back to an area of camp that impacts so many!

I am excited to tell you about our new board members! We have been so fortunate to add six new board members since I arrived last year. We will be introducing them to you on our Facebook page over the next couple of weeks. Please be on the lookout for those, and help us welcome them to the Kern Family. Some have been long-time friends of Kern, and others are brand new to the family. If you or someone you know would like to join one of our committees or even just help on a specific event, we would love that! Some great options are our Golf Outing, Get Kids to Camp Annual Campaign, Artic Dash, Beer Tasting, and Facilities committees.

Lastly, we have received a grant to install ten "Relaxation Stations." As you may have experienced, we put significant time and money over the years into our Ropes Courses and sports programs. We also understand that there are times campers need a choice and to have the option to take a break from the high stimulation activities that are prevalent at camp. These stations will be in locations that are next to our heavily used activities and/or where waiting in line is needed, such as our zip-line and Ga-Ga pit. Doing something quiet and calm is just as acceptable and engaging as other camp activities, and campers can also learn that taking a break or calming down after an intense or exciting experience/game can be helpful. We expect this to translate to fewer instances of campers making less desirable behavior choices in these areas in particular, as they can self-assess their need to step away and have a good way to do so while still being supervised within that program area.

As much of the outdoor world prepares to sleep for the winter, we simply adjust our focus for the changing seasons and let the warmth of a campfire work its magic on us. As we all want to linger...

Todd Brinkman



Ozone Zipline

A great way to reconnect with Kern

Looking for an "excuse" to visit Kern? Now's your chance to embark on a thrilling journey down memory lane at Ozone Zipline Adventures —an exhilarating experience nestled in the heart of Camp Kern's breathtaking surroundings. Reconnect with the spirit of camaraderie as you soar through the treetops, creating new memories that will blend seamlessly with the cherished moments of your camp days. Join us at Ozone Zipline Adventures for an adventure-filled day that combines the nostalgia of Camp Kern with the excitement of high-flying ziplining—where the bonds of friendship are not just remembered but also renewed among the treetops!

Staff Spotlight - Jesús Castaño

I had the pleasure of sitting down with Jesús Castaño, our very own Summer Camper Director, who is fresh off his first summer in this role at Camp Kern. While it is already hard to imagine Kern without the dynamic guy, who answers to “Hey Zeus!” (see what he did there?), he actually began his United States camping career in Utah, as an international camp counselor at Camp Roger, traveling all the way from his home in Bogotá, Colombia. He spent much of his own childhood summers visiting relatives with his brother, Alex, going where it was warmer and they could swim, play football, and be in nature. As they got older, finding ways to earn their own money, like selling tamales or ice cream was a frequent endeavor. One of his pals and Camp Roger co-workers, none other than his immediate predecessor here, Gus, is the one who initially encouraged him to come to Ohio. And oh my goodness what a significant decision he made to join the staff of the BEST CAMP IN THE NATION! If you started coming here as a young camper, you may not remember a time when all of camp was new to you. As an adult, coming to a camp the size of Kern (we are REALLY big!), Jesús recalls how challenging it was to figure out all the Kern lingo for places, like the “5-6 trail” and “Wippa”, and how overwhelming it felt to try and learn everyone’s names. But of course he does not scare easily, and found his way. “I remember one day I was just standing I think between Singerman and Boda. I don’t know, just like looking at the shade tree and the chalk board and parking lot, and I was like, this now feels familiar. It feels like I belong here. This feels good.”

Living in Ohio has meant adapting of course. Growing up in a mountainous region of Colombia, now being in the mid-west, with our dense fog, and humid summers, this is more like weather in places he would go only for a short time, while on vacation. And fun fact – Jesús is NOT a fan of spiders, which certainly come with the territory around these parts. Among the wonderful experiences he had as the Assistant Summer Camp Director in 2021, Jesús met Karley Holdeman. And following many a Camp Director’s path, they fell in love and got married. She now holds the esteemed status of “Kern Alumni”, is a huge support to Jesús in particular and a significant member of Camp Kern’s community.

When I asked Jesús what surprised him about his first summer in this new role, he answered without much need to ponder – just how big this job truly is. And he says this without it feeling like a negative – simply a truth about the depth of responsibility that comes with this amazing work. The difference between knowing how to do the camp stuff, such as talk to parents and campers, managing staff, email communication etc, and feeling the weight of “once you sit in that director’s chair, you are the last person making some of those big decisions, that’s when I realized this is way

bigger than I thought”. So where does he find the greatest joy? Just where you might expect – the kids! Seeing campers work through challenges, such as feeling homesick, learning to make friends, or go through something tough, but get through it and stay the week is powerful. Especially meaningful to Jesús, was the success of the Latino campers who came to Kern last summer through the El Puente program, for which he put in a lot of work and energy prior to summer. This was an entirely new experience for children as well as their families. Jesús recalls in particular at the end of the week, watching families seeing this experience from a different perspective, realizing their child had never been exposed to anything like this before – and they did it! A couple of them were even in tears because they had missed their child so much, and at the same time were so happy for their camper, and excited to come back next year. Those accomplishments for campers and families brought the joy in big and wonderful ways.

Jesús draws on his family in Colombia for inspiration. He knows it is special, to be living the goals you set for yourself...to be a summer camp director, working full time year round at a large YMCA camp in the states. So when he misses his parents, who he has not seen in over a year, “I know they are so proud of me, it would be a disservice to quit on things because I’m missing them, so I use that sense of missing my family to be like the fuel that keeps going. I have to make them proud.” When you live where you work, it can be challenging to find balance. Jesús has come to appreciate being able to take advantage of camp’s setting, with many places for getting to talk things out and clear your mind before arriving home. He understands the importance of spending good time with his wife and dog, Guava, and being able to reset for the following day. He and Karley will travel to Colombia in December, and that reunion with family is sure to be wonderful!

Right here at camp, it is the chance to connect with people in meaningful ways that motivates Jesús. Knowing you can make a difference through your interactions with campers, with staff and with families is the most rewarding. Connected to that concept is Jesús’ favorite Camp Kern tradition. “I absolutely love Vespers. You cannot give the kids that sense of belonging and relationship building and community, and really true deep reflection other than what you achieve through Vespers. That’s why I love it” Looking ahead to next summer, there is much to be excited about. Jesús, along our Teen and Family Director, MacKallie, are creating some new opportunities along with bringing back some older traditions to campers for 2024. The process of interviewing both new and returning staff and perfecting the Summer Camp 2024 program will keep him busy and loving his job all year long!

FROM THE CAMP ARCHIVES

Camping Offers a Certain Magic

Originally Published in the Summer 1995 Newsletter

"As a pediatrician, I see kids everyday from broken homes and crumbling support systems. I see children who have nothing to hang on to anymore or to help them feel good about themselves," said Stuart T. Weinberg, M.D. For Weinberg, one answer to the problem is summer camp.

Weinberg is a summer camp convert. In fact, he founded the Carl B. Kern Fund in 1987 to perpetuate the memory of the Dayton YMCA's Boys' Work Secretary Carl B. Kern (after whom YMCA's Camp Kern is named) and to further the awareness of what summer camp can do for children.

His establishment of the Kern endowment fund in The Dayton Foundation came after 14 years of his summer experiences at Camp Kern, first as a camper, then as a counselor and support staff person. Weinberg enrolled at Camp Kern at the age of eight. He went, like most children, to have fun. He came away, however, with much more - with lessons about himself, and about life.

"One of the most important things camp can offer a child is self-esteem," Weinberg said. "What I remember about camp is that you, as the kid, were the focus. Most of the time, away from camp, I was Mr. and Mrs. Weinberg's son. When I went to Camp Kern, the counselors knew me. This is Stuart, they would say, and Stuart's parents. It felt like you belonged somewhere. It was a second home for a lot of kids- a place of consistency summer after summer, a place you could feel comfortable and safe."

Also important, he said, are the lessons of tolerance learned when you live so closely with children from all sectors of the community. They are lessons of how to work together and solve differences. "We were like a family," he said, and the camp counselors, their role models.

The importance of role models is a key aspect of summer camp for Weinberg. It is the reason he named the endowment fund after Carl B. Kern, with permission from Kern's relatives living in Germantown.

"Carl B. Kern was like a big brother to the boys in the city," Weinberg said. "As a YMCA director, he



Stuart Weinberg and campers at the Tavern.

demonstrated the difference that a role model can make in the lives of people. When he died in 1917 at the age of 37, there was such an outpouring of emotion in the city."

Through the Carl B. Kern fund, Weinberg wants people to understand that "we need more role models out there" and that they can change people's lives.

Since 1989, the income from the Carl B. Kern endowment has primarily funded scholarships for children who otherwise would not have been able to attend Camp Kern or receive leadership training. "Now that we know all the benefits camping can offer," Weinberg said, "we on the Fund Advisory Board feel strongly that camp is available to more than just part of the population and that attendance is not determined just by ability to pay."

As chair of the Advisory Board, Wienberg talks whenever and wherever he can about what Carl B. Kern stood for and the "magical nature of summer camp." To assure that the philosophy that these represent is perpetuated, he and the Advisory Board are working to build their endowment fund.

Weinberg knows that not all camps accomplish such positive things for children and that not all children can be reached through this medium. The Carl B. Kern Fund, however, looks to foster the conditions that make for the best of what camping has to offer. "It made my life better," Weinberg said. The hope is that the Carl B. Kern Fund will do the same for others.

ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT

Caitlin McGee



Summer 2012

I have always loved the idea of camp. A child of the 90's, Bug Juice was all the convincing I needed. After getting to be a counselor at Canter's Cave, I was so enamored with the idea that "work at camp" made it onto my list of life goals, stashed in the back of a journal. I worked at a few different camps during college summers, and finally ended up at Kern in 2012. Over the years I did summer camp, outdoor education, and a stint as office manager for the Leadership Department. I particularly enjoyed working with campers or groups that don't always get the opportunity to spend time outdoors, let alone a whole week. I am the rare camp introvert, so it was also important to me that Kern provided chances for all personalities to have a magical experience. My favorite things about camp are a bit intangible - the smell of Singerman Lodge, hearing a campfire song from a half mile away, or just the feeling of anticipation every time I turn in the drive. Though I did not end up staying on full time, I still try to catch a little of that Bug Juice magic by volunteering at Caesar Creek State Park and coming back to Kern for Alumni days. I have enjoyed seeing camp evolve through the years, and can't wait to see what adventures the future holds!

Word Search Fun

R E W O T S E T E P
L R M T G O K S T D
K O V N N C A Z U Y
E C O A R L L Z I P
L S C P F I K P T C
C Q X E H M L J O M
R C G O B B E Z G G
I S R O Q I O M I V
C S G S D N E I R F
E P C M E G O E Z O

- Canoe
- Circle K
- Climbing
- Elk Lake
- Friends
- Horse
- Ozone
- Pete's Tower
- Pool
- Songs
- Zip



In Memory of Stuart Weinberg

Ardent Supporter of Camp Kern

It is with heavy hearts that we reflect upon the life and legacy of Stuart Weinberg, a cherished figure whose indelible mark on YMCA Camp Kern will forever be etched in the memories of those fortunate enough to have known him. Stuart's unwavering dedication and tireless efforts have been instrumental in shaping the character and spirit of Camp Kern, fostering an environment where countless individuals have found joy, camaraderie, and personal growth. His passion for creating transformative experiences for campers and his commitment to the values of the YMCA have left an enduring impact on generations. In addition to his remarkable contributions to the camp, Stuart was a stalwart advocate for the Camp Kern alumni community, exemplifying the true spirit of Kern Blood. His work with alumni strengthened the bonds that made Camp Kern a second home for many, creating a network that spanned generations. Stuart's tireless efforts extended beyond the campfires, as he played a pivotal role in managing and advancing the Carl B Kern Fund, ensuring that the legacy of generosity and support for Camp Kern continued to thrive. As we mourn the loss of this extraordinary leader, we are grateful for the positive influence he had on the camp and alumni community, and we extend our deepest condolences to his family, friends, and all those who had the privilege of sharing in his vision for a vibrant and nurturing Camp Kern. Stuart Weinberg's legacy will undoubtedly continue to inspire and uplift the spirits of campers and alumni alike for years to come. Please join us in celebrating a few fond memories below:

Whether Stuart was expounding on the finer points of lanyard making or slinging Capt. Crunch bars from the camp commissary he was all about Kern, If I had to pick one person, place or thing that embodied the spirit of Camp Kern it would have to be Stuart. He was kind, generous, funny as all get out and an expert on camp lore and traditions. He has a big place in my heart as I am sure he does in all the campers and counselors who knew him over the years. I am forever grateful for my time at Camp Kern and to have spent my time there with Stuart. -Kim Richey

When I was a camper in the 80's, Stuart was a superhero of nerdy silliness. As an awkward kid myself, he was a beacon of light in the fog of bullying I received outside of camp. He made camp a refuge for kids like me and bred a spirit of ridiculousness among the staff that was as comforting as it was wild. By his example of universal weirdness coupled with kindness and attention to the individual, Camp Kern became the magical, storied space that it still is today. When I transitioned to being a counselor at Kern, I carried on that spirit that Stuart demonstrated by embodying outlandish antics and endless compassion at the same time. I carried this way of being into my own career as an educator and my mission as a parent. If I was greeted by Stuart's, "How the squat are ya?" today, I would say, "Better. Thanks to you." -P.R. Frank

Stuart was my CIT for my first year of being a counselor at Camp Kern, and it was more like he was helping train me to learn how to be a great counselor in summer camp. Every kid that came in contact with Stuart knew that he loved them and made them feel special. And he made our entire staff feel the exact same way year after year ... His enthusiasm for Kern was immeasurable. He made many special efforts to stay in touch with me over the years and encouraged me in my work throughout my musical career with the Banana Slug String Band! Camp Kern is where I learned my deep love for the earth and sharing it's magic with children... I'm forever grateful for all that Kern taught me and I use to this day in my musical mission with the Slugs !Spatula Stu's most recent communications with me always began with, "Dougie , how the squat are you! " He was so kind , caring , hilarious and wise! I'm comforted, knowing that he has made an unforgettable, powerful influence on so many humans lives! I am just sitting here & w a teary smile thinking about our beautiful Stuart....xo to one of the greats! -Doug (Dirt) Greenfield



In lieu of donations,
the family has asked
for donations to the
Carl B. Kern Fund.



Kern Makes a Life-Long Impact

In the heart of nature's embrace lies YMCA Camp Kern, a sanctuary that transcends the ordinary camp experience. Nestled in the scenic expanse overlooking the Little Miami River Valley, this haven offers more than just a retreat—it cultivates a profound connection with the outdoors. From scaling the heights of Pete's Tower to the exhilarating zipline adventures across the valley, Camp Kern provides an immersive escape into the beauty of nature. The significance of this journey extends beyond the thrilling activities; it intertwines with the laughter echoing in goofy camp songs, the camaraderie formed during shared adventures, and the bonds forged in the glow of a campfire. Whether it's a brief day visit or an annual week-long summer sojourn, Camp Kern becomes more than just a destination—it becomes a part of one's essence.

The essence of YMCA Camp Kern lies in its ability to create lasting memories and forge friendships that stand the test of time. Each moment spent within its hallowed grounds contributes to a tapestry of experiences that remain etched in the soul. It is a place where the spirit of adventure and the joy of togetherness converge, leaving an indelible mark on those who partake in its offerings. The memories made at Camp Kern are not confined to the duration of a stay; they become a part of one's identity, a reservoir of inspiration and nostalgia. It is a testament to the transformative power of nature and community, encapsulating the magic that happens when hearts are open, and spirits are ignited. YMCA Camp Kern isn't just a destination; it is a lifelong journey that weaves its way into the fabric of one's being, forever holding a cherished place in the heart.



Alumni Committee

Andrea Kaercher
Curtis Wright
Emily Tittle
Lori Schwartz
Megan Trowbridge
Traci Hale
Jesus Castano*
Loretta Deters*
Todd Brinkman*

*Camp Staff

As a member of the Camp Kern community, you already know what an incredible experience it is to spend time at camp. The memories, friendships, and skills gained during your time at Kern are likely some of your most cherished possessions. As such, we would like to extend an invitation for you to get involved with the Camp Kern Alumni Committee.

The committee is responsible for designing events, writing newsletters, and recruiting alumni participation. By joining the committee, you'll have the opportunity to help plan events that bring the Kern community together, stay informed about camp news and updates, and help build a strong network of Kern alumni.

Whether you're interested in organizing events, writing articles for the newsletter, or simply want to stay connected with your fellow Kern alumni, we'd love to have you join the committee. Your involvement will not only help us continue to build a vibrant alumni community, but it will also give you the chance to stay connected to the place that holds such a special place in your heart. Email us at campkernfamily@gmail.com.