

Camp Firefly helps dozens of children deal with loss

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MEDFORD TOWNSHIP — About 40 children grieving from the loss of a parent, sibling or special person in their lives got to have some summer fun during the 14th annual Camp Firefly at YMCA of the Pines last weekend.

The event provides a free overnight camp to Burlington, Camden and Gloucester County children ages 7 to 14 who are grieving from the loss of a loved one.

With the support of The Hospice of Moorestown VNA's team of grief professionals and counselors, children took part in swimming, canoeing, hiking, arts and crafts and cookouts while participating in specialized bereavement activities to help overcome their grief, organizers said.

Along with the fun activities, the children designed and built small boats with mementos of their loved ones and lit candles that were launched from the shores of the camp's lake. Campers also spent time at an outdoor memorial service where children and counselors shared memories and stories of lost loved ones, organizers said.

Since its inception, more than 500 children have been provided a place to remember lost loved ones and heal through the help of community donations.

Along with its support of the camp, Moorestown Visiting Nurse Association offers free grief support programs for adults and children all year. For information, contact the group at 856-552-1300, services@moorestownvna.org or visit moorestownvna.org and facebook/moorestownvna.



Campers and counselors share impromptu moments of intense discussion about family and loss. [PHOTOS COURTESY OF MOORESTOWN VISITING NURSE ASSOCIATION]



LEFT: Campers express themselves while dyeing T-shirts together.



RIGHT: A camp counselor gives a few instructions before launching a camper for a fun ride on the "giant swing."

ELECTIONS

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In a statement announcing the endorsements, union leaders said they were backing candidates who share the union's priorities and values and those they believe will be good advocates for both teachers and students.

"NJEA members have seen the profound impact that political decisions have on their lives and on the lives of their students," NJEA President Marie Blistan said. "NJEA members have always been active participants in the political process, because we care about our profession and our students."

Peters and Stanfield said the key endorsement "underscores the fact that the Stanfield-Peters for Assembly team is best equipped to improve public education, keep our children and schools safe, promote bipartisan solutions to the problems plaguing our state, and make New Jersey more affordable for working families and seniors."

They also said it showed they are the best choices to fight for the restoration of millions in state aid that district schools are expected to lose over the next several years due to the school funding formula change.

LaPlaca and Natale focused on Peters' voting record in a response, noting that the first-term legislator voted against the state budgets in 2018 and 2019 that included the largest state payments into public employee pension systems in the state's history.

"It's no surprise to see Trenton insider Ryan Peters squeeze out a political endorsement from the union. After voting twice against funding the pension for teachers, only someone cutting shady side deals would be endorsed by their union for re-election," said Mickey Quinn, a spokesman



Republicans Jean Stanfield, of Westampton, and Ryan Peters, of Hainesport, are running for the 8th District Assembly. [DAVID LEVINSKY / STAFF]

for LaPlaca's and Natale's campaign. "Teachers across the 8th legislative district should be asking themselves why a retirement cutting, anti-public education legislator is someone worth voting for, and what are the terms of the arrangement he made to betray hard-working teachers and support staff."

School funding changes and proposed pension reforms are expected to be the two biggest talking points for the candidates this fall.

Republicans have traditionally represented the 8th district, which is made up of a large swath of eastern and central Burlington County, as well as the towns of Waterford, Berlin Borough and Pine Hill in Camden County and Hammonton in Atlantic County. But Democrats have become a much greater political force in Burlington and have targeted the district's Assembly seats as prime pickups to pad the party's large majority.

Peters, a former Burlington County freeholder who was elected to the Assembly in

2017, has become the early target, with the Democrats focusing on votes they believe are out of touch with district voters beliefs.

LaPlaca's and Natale's statement last week cited the Assembly's 2018 vote to restore close to \$7.5 million in state funding for family planning and women's health clinics such as Planned Parenthood that former Gov. Chris Christie had cut. The supplemental spending bill was approved in February by a 47-20 vote that was divided along party lines. It would become the first bill Gov. Phil Murphy signed into law.

In June this year, Peters also voted against legislation that would require insurance plans to provide benefits mandated by the Affordable Care Act such as maternity and newborn care and the costs of all contraceptives if the federal law is struck down or changed.

"From supporting efforts to gut funding for women's health care and family planning services to voting against requiring insurance companies to cover birth control,



Gina LaPlaca, of Lumberton, and Mark Natale, of Evesham, are the Democratic nominees running for the 8th Legislative District's two Assembly seats. [COURTESY OF THE LAPLACA-NATALE FOR ASSEMBLY CAMPAIGN]

Ryan Peters has shown his true extremist colors in Trenton," the two Democrats said in a statement.

The Republicans' campaign fired back with their statement comparing Peters' service as a Navy SEAL with LaPlaca's and Natale's careers.

LaPlaca, of Lumberton, started her career in the Statehouse in the Office of Legislative Services and worked as an aide to former Assembly Speaker Joe Roberts. But she has also worked as a government lobbyist for Verizon and Anheuser-Busch.

Natale, of Evesham, graduated from the Rutgers School of Law in 2013 and clerked in the U.S. District judge before starting his practice as an attorney specializing in employment law.

Angelo Lamberto, campaign manager for the Stanfield-Peters campaign, pointed to an ongoing federal civil case involving a group of actresses and models who have sued several restaurants and lounges for using their images

on social media posts advertising their businesses without their permission. Natale is listed as an attorney representing one of the defendants, a night club in Atlantic City.

"While Gina LaPlaca was busy working as a sleazy lobbyist in Trenton helping her corporate clients avoid paying taxes and politically connected lawyer Mark Natale was defending (night club) owners accused of taking advantage of young women, Ryan Peters left his wife and young children at home and put his life on the line to free women and children from oppression in Iraq. Ryan won't be lectured to by two political hacks like LaPlaca and Natale about women's rights now or ever," Lamberto said Friday.

This year Peters also voted in support of a bipartisan maternal health package that included measures providing Medicaid coverage for doulas — trained nonclinical professionals who assist mothers before, during and after childbirth — as well as a creation of best practices for maternal care.