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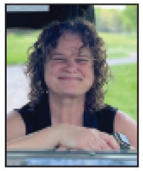
expert contributor



Summer Still Matters:

LET THEM GO, WATCH THEM GROW AT YMCA OF THE PINES

CAMP FOR CHARACTER SINCE 1906–CELEBRATING OUR 120TH ANNIVERSARY



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In an era dominated by screens, schedules, and structured achievement, there remains a place where childhood unfolds the way it should, outdoors, unhurried, and full of possibility. YMCA of the Pines summer camp is a seasonal program that's a living tradition rooted in 120 years of purpose, community, and transformation. Its philosophy is simple but powerful: let them go, watch them grow.





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Founded in 1906, YMCA of the Pines was created to help young people build character while immersed in nature. Today, that vision thrives across more than 800 acres in the New Jersey Pinelands. Towering pines, winding trails, and the waters of Lake Stockwell and Matolly Waters replace the noise of daily life, creating space for each person to **explore, grow, and thrive**.

Campers find their place at Camp Ockanickon, Camp Matollionequay, and Lake Stockwell Day Camp—each designed to meet children where they are while encouraging them to stretch beyond their comfort zones. Whether climbing a ropes course, paddling across the lake, or building friendships in a cabin, every moment is intentional. At the core are six values: **caring, honesty, respect, responsibility, courage, and inclusion**—lived daily through every interaction and challenge.

But for families, letting go requires trust. At YMCA of the Pines, safety is the foundation that makes growth possible. The camps are accredited by the American Camp Association, meeting national standards for health, safety, staffing, and program quality. YMCA of the Pines is also Praesidium Accredited, reflecting a strong commitment to abuse prevention through rigorous policies, staff training, and accountability. These measures ensure every child is supported and protected every day.

Each week, more than 800 campers are guided by trained counselors who serve as mentors and role models. They are the steady presence behind every breakthrough, the homesick camper who finds confidence, or the hesitant child who discovers resilience.

Inclusivity is not just a value; it is a practice. YMCA of the Pines welcomes children of all backgrounds, with upwards of $600,000 in financial assistance provided annually to ensure access for all families. The result is a diverse, supportive community where every child belongs.

But perhaps the most powerful measure of the camp's impact is its legacy. Generations of families return year after year, their stories overlapping across decades. In South Jersey, it is nearly impossible not to meet someone whose life was shaped, in some small but meaningful way, by a summer at one of our camps. For generations, we've been a rite of passage. Families return year after year, trusting their children will come home a little braver, stronger, and more themselves.

Because sometimes the greatest gift you can give a child is the chance to step away—and the confidence to grow.

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