



Camp Fire USA™

Today's kids. Tomorrow's leaders.

SIGNALS

A QUARTERLY PUBLICATION OF CAMP FIRE USA
WEST MICHIGAN COUNCIL

OUR MISSION

Camp Fire USA builds caring, confident youth and future leaders.

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

Letter from the Chair	2
Valentines for Veterans	3
Family at Camelot	4
Thank you!	6
More AIKD	7
Calendar	8



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Who is Absolutely Incredible!

Kids! Join Camp Fire as we celebrate West Michigan's absolutely incredible kids on Thursday, March 18, Absolutely Incredible Kid Day (AIKD).

AIKD is Camp Fire's call to action designed to encourage adults to write letters of love, encouragement and support to children. Seventeen community businesses, organizations and colleges have been working hard to make sure 3,330 elementary students in Grand Rapids Public Schools will have a personalized letter to open on Absolutely Incredible Kid Day.

Heartfelt thanks to our letter-writing volunteers, WOOD TV8's Maranda, AIKD spokesperson, and to our event underwriters: Grand Valley State University, Huntington Bank, Meijer, Inc., Mercantile Bank, and Michigan Reading Association. Your support means so much to Camp Fire and to the kids.



If you would like the kids in your life to be one of the many children opening a letter on March 18, visit our website (www.campfireusawmc.org) for special letter-head to download and letter-writing tips to get you started.

Meet one of Camp Fire's Absolutely Incredible Volunteers

In December 2003, Barbara Reinken finished serving her final term on Camp Fire's board of directors after six years. "When I was invited to join the board, I liked the mission and vision that Camp Fire was developing," says Barb. "Especially important to me were Camp Fire's Club and after-school programs. The focus on both academic and social responsibility is so very important."

While serving on Camp Fire's board, Barb's passion has been Camp Fire's Absolutely Incredible Kid Day (AIKD). "AIKD is such an exciting and important event," says Barb. "It's a perfect example of how anyone and everyone can help our youth learn to be the best that they can be. Not only does it let our youth know that they can be who ever they want to be, but this message is reinforced in writing. Verbal language just doesn't have the impact that written

continued on Page 5



Camp Fire USA West Michigan Council offers children and youth a variety of programs that foster self-esteem, healthy lifestyles, character development, leadership skills and social responsibility. Along with our Club program, Camp Fire coordinates after-school and summer programs in the Camelot Woods housing community and in the neighborhoods around Burton Elementary & Middle Schools, C.A. Frost, Coit, Eastern, Henry Paideia, and Jefferson Elementary schools. Camp Fire also offers life skills courses in schools, child care centers and other settings.

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From our Board Chair

At Camp Fire, the year promises to be full of changes, challenges, and excitement. Beginning January 1st, Gayle Orange became Camp Fire's Interim Executive Director. She is a familiar face at Camp Fire, with over nine years of experience with the organization, most recently as its Assistant Executive Director. Gayle brings to the position a wealth of program knowledge, leadership skills, community involvement and passion for serving children and youth. On behalf of the board, we look forward to working with her in this new capacity.

As March 18 approaches, the Council is preparing for this year's Absolutely Incredible Kid Day. The national letter-writing event is in its eighth year, and in West Michigan is gearing up to be the biggest yet. We are hosting a Letter-writing Extravaganza at the Children's Museum on Saturday, March 13 and have recruited over 17 businesses and organizations to write letters to adopted classrooms and schools in Grand Rapids Public Schools. Don't forget to take a moment to tell the children in your life in a letter how special they are.

2004 has also brought significant challenges to Camp Fire. Two of the after-school programs were affected by the loss of TANF funding as a result of the state budget crisis. The Coit and Eastern elementary programs remain open due to creative thinking and collaboration with GRPS, United Way and the City of Grand Rapids. Staff hours were reduced, two positions were eliminated and program offerings were scaled back. This was a one-time solution for these programs in order to support our commitment to the children and families in the Coit and Eastern neighborhoods. We know moving into Summer 2004 and the 2004-05 school year that state funding and other sources of revenue will most likely be reduced because of similar budget situations.

Without a doubt, it is a challenging time for the organization and the children and youth we serve. We will continue to move forward with new ways to generate revenue, but we also need your help. Please consider helping children and youth by making a gift to Camp Fire. A reply envelope has been included in this newsletter for your convenience.

Together, we can build caring, confident youth and future leaders. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Joe Tomaszewski

Congratulations Gayle!

Best wishes in your new role as
Interim Executive Director.

Camp Fire Club celebrates Valentine's Day with veterans

This Valentine's Day, members from Kathy Gingerich's Camp Fire Discovery Club in Lowell spent the morning delivering valentines to residents of the Grand Rapids Home for Veterans. The project was part of Salute to Hospitalized Veterans, a Camp Fire USA national project that seeks to educate youth about veterans and their contributions to our country, and teach about compassion and caring along the way.

This was a special visit for Kathy and her Club. It was the first opportunity in 18 years of leading Clubs that one of her Clubs was able to visit veterans on Valentine's Day. Work schedules, scheduling conflicts, or Club members that were too young all made a Valentine's Day visit challenging in the past. But this year everything fell into place.

That morning, Club members distributed over 200 valentines made by the Lowell and St. Patrick's Camp Fire Clubs. Valentines were colorful and creative - some were downright patriotic - and all of them were a big hit with the vets.

"I'm very happy we went," said Kathy. "It was really good for the kids, and they warmed up to the visit."



Lowell's Discovery Club

Back row: Kathy Gingerich, Bill Holloway, Thomas Fleet (friend of Timmy Gingerich), Timmy Gingerich, Sherry Grimm

Front row: Miranda Grimm, Heather Riemersma, Alexis Holloway, Renae Reed



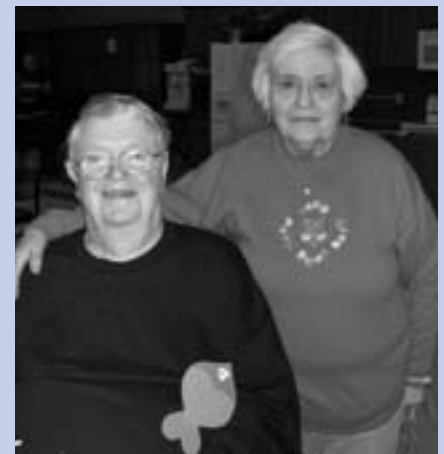
Heather, Renae, Miranda and Alexis with Ed Petrovich.



Alexis with Al Schram.

Valentine's Day visit uncovers Alumni

Marge and Richard "Doc" Wierenga were spending their morning in the lounge at the Grand Rapids Home for Veterans when Camp Fire arrived to deliver valentines. As she spoke to Club Co-Leader Sherry Grimm, Marge mentioned that she had been a Camp Fire Girl when she was young. It turns out, Marge had been a member of the Kelloggsville Camp Fire Girls, led by Mrs. Versluis. She vividly remembers attending Council Fire at the armory in downtown Grand Rapids and that Camp Fire was always "lots of fun."



Marge & Richard Wierenga

B.C. Club spreads Valentine's cheer

In Battle Creek, Gerry Codling's Club members were busy with their own Valentine's celebration. On February 5th, ten of Gerry's Club members visited the Battle Creek Veterans Affairs Medical Center to deliver over 500 valentines and cookies. The kids visited with 75 residents, and arranged to have their goodies passed out to other wards.

Club members also made valentine treats for residents of a local nursing home. For almost 40 years, Gerry's Camp Fire Clubs have helped this facility celebrate holidays. This year the delivery arrived February 13, just in time for Valentine's Day.

Ten Ways You Can Help Camp Fire USA

1.
Volunteer at the Camp Fire office
2.
Work with kids in
Camp Fire's After-School
Program
3.
Write a letter on Absolutely
Incredible Kid Day
4.
Make a financial
contribution to Camp Fire
5.
Ask a Camp Fire representative
to speak to your organization,
company, or church
6.
Become a Club Leader
7.
Sponsor a Camp Fire
member or volunteer for
Walk for Kids
8.
Donate program
supplies for
Camp Fire programs
9.
Ask your coworkers to
sponsor a class or school for
Absolutely Incredible Kid Day
10.
Serve on a Camp Fire
committee or board

Camelot Woods is a family affair

Meet the Phillips family - Linda, Jaylen (age 5), Taisheena (age 9), and Javon (age 11). These children have been coming to Camp Fire's after-school program at Camelot Woods since we first opened the doors to the Community Center in 1999. At that time, Javon, now a fifth grader, was in first grade, and his younger sister was in kindergarten. Taisheena is now in the fourth grade, and Jaylen has just started his first year of the after-school program as a kindergartener.

Camp Fire first came to Camelot Woods at the request of Wingate Management, the company managing the subsidized housing community. They wanted to offer families a program that would benefit both children and their parents. That's exactly what Camp Fire does. Linda Phillips' children "really like the program," and she feels that her "kids get a lot from the program and learn from it, too."

The photo below shows Linda with her own children, and her niece and two nephews, who also attend the after-school program at Camelot Woods.



Linda Phillips and family

*Back row: Jocelyn Nelson (niece), Jaylen Phillips, Linda Phillips, Javon Phillips, and D'angelo Lewis (nephew)
Front row: Jaylin Nelson (nephew) and Taisheena Phillips*

Welcome new board members!

At its January 15 meeting, the board of directors elected the following new members:

Dr. Sally Hipp

Ellen Schiller

An Associate Professor at Grand Valley State University, Sally is a former Camp Fire leader and was the principal of Eastern Elementary when Camp Fire began its after-school program at that site.

Ellen is also an Associate Professor at Grand Valley, and president of the local Gamma Phi Beta alumni group. Ellen has already asked the alumni to adopt a classroom for Absolutely Incredible Kid Day.

(from Page 1)

language has. I know because I have seen it in children's faces."

As an associate professor focusing on literacy education at Grand Valley State University (GVSU), Barb has been instrumental in garnering the university's support for AIKD, both financial and through the participation of students, faculty, and employees. It is her belief that faculty need to model for pre-service teachers things they should do in their own classroom. "Helping my students to be able to say positive things to children is very important, says Barb. "So the first year that this project was completed at GVSU, students in the pre-teacher program wrote letters to children. I think we wrote 500 letters."



Since then, AIKD at GVSU has grown to the point that all employees and students are asked to write a letter to a child. This is also the second year that Barb has asked Aquinas College to join the ranks resulting in another 500 letters. In addition to GVSU and Aquinas, Davenport University, local service organizations, businesses, and others have volunteered to write letters. "The power in coming together and supporting our youth has a very lasting effect, one that I am very excited to be a part of," says Barb.

In addition to her work with Camp Fire, Barb gives away children's and adolescent literature to worthy causes. "It is very important that we get books into children's hands," says Barb. "In my small way, I try to do this." She also serves as a committee member of the Celebrate Literacy Conference that occurs in the fall each year.

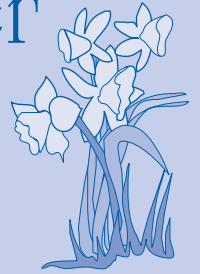
Barb's personal mission is to help prepare our children and youth so they can become active, knowledgeable, and informed participants in our global world. "Literacy in the broadest terms – written and spoken — is the basis for participation," says Barb, "and she seeks to share this mission with all of the members of the Camp Fire, volunteers, Board of Directors, and I truly believe that Camp Fire is one of the best-kept secrets in West Michigan."

"I truly believe that Camp Fire is one of the best kept secrets in West Michigan."

- Barb Reinken

Camp Fire thanks you Barb, for your efforts on behalf of children. You are absolutely incredible!

Spring Flower Sale



Welcome Spring into your home with flowers. Now through March 13, Camp Fire is taking orders for beautiful spring flowers from Molesta Floral.

Colorful tulips, delicate hyacinths, brilliant yellow daffodils, white, elegant Easter lilies, tall mums and flowering azaleas. Prices range from \$7.00 - \$12.00 and all promise to have beautiful blooms to help chase away Winter.

Flowers can be purchased from Club members or at the Camp Fire office and will be available Saturday, March 27 and Monday March 29.

For more information contact Ursula at 616 949 2500 ext. 28 or club@campfireusawmc.org.

Wingate helped make the season bright!

A heartfelt thank you goes out to Wingate Management for underwriting this year's holiday party at Camelot Woods. Wingate provided the holiday treats and all the materials for the activity tables at the party. In return, Camp Fire opened its doors to all the children of Camelot Woods. Thank you!



Wish List

Camp Fire is looking for a few things for the after-school program that you might have around the house.

- CDs - like the free AOL trial CDs
- Gently used puzzles and board games
- Disposable cameras
- Baby food jars

If you would like to donate any of these items, please call the Council office at 949 2500. Thank you!

Clubs cheer on the Rampage

Donated tickets let three clubs see the Rampage in action.

Thanks to Alticor and Prudential Securities Club members from Lowell, Grattan Township, and Coopersville were able to attend two Rampage games in February. Kathy Gingerich's Lowell Discovery Club and Barb Myer's Coopersville Starflight and Adventure Clubs attended the Rampage Home Opener on Saturday, February 14 courtesy of Alticor. Mary Jo Hanson's Adventure Club from St. Patrick's School in Grattan Township went to the February 22 game with tickets donated by Prudential Securities.

According to Kathy Gingerich, "Everyone had a good time", despite the team's loss to the Colorado Crush on February 14. Mary Jo submitted a few photos of her Club in action at the February 22 game.



Thank you
Prudential Securities &
Alticor!

Put it in writing on Absolutely Incredible Kid Day

Write a letter with Camp Fire on March 13.

Bring your kids to the Grand Rapids Children's Museum for a Letter-Writing Extravaganza on Saturday, March 13 from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. While your children, grandchildren, nieces or nephews enjoy the museum exhibits, visit the Camp Fire table for special stationary and stickers for Absolutely Incredible Kid Day. Better yet, write a letter to the absolutely incredible kids in your life and see how this simple act can positively impact the life of a child.

For more information, please call 949 2500, ext. 30 or send an e-mail to aikd@campfiresawmc.org.



Use this sheet to make additional copies for friends and to write a note to your favorite kid!

Tips for writing an Absolutely Incredible Kid Day letter

1. Getting started can be the toughest part. Form a mental picture of the child and the things that you enjoy or appreciate about the child.
2. Make a list of adjectives that describe the child: funny, smart, skillful, helpful, caring.
3. Remember fun times or special moments you and the child have shared. Refer to these events and tell the child what you enjoyed about that time.
4. Be specific and be descriptive. Use humor. Try, "Do you know what I like about you? I like it when you..."
5. Don't worry about the length. A note can be cherished as much as an epistle.
6. Write it by hand. Feel free to make edits as you go.
7. Get creative! Send an encouraging e-mail, postcard, or greeting card, or put it in a lunch box or on a bed stand.

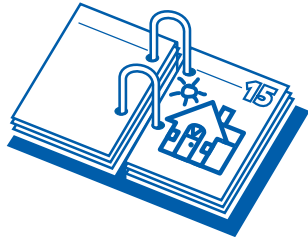
Find time to write another letter. Make it a habit. Write a letter now!



Learn more about Camp Fire USA
West Michigan Council
616 949 2500
info@campfiresawmc.org

Mark your calendar!

Spring Flower Sale orders due	March 13
Absolutely Incredible Kid Day Letter-writing Extravaganza	March 13
Absolutely Incredible Kid Day	March 18
Board Meeting	March 18
Camp Fire Celebration	March 27
Spring Flower pick-up/delivery	March 27 & 29
Last day of program before Spring break	April 2
Program resumes	April 12



Celebrate Camp Fire's 93rd birthday at the Action Bead Fair and Art Competition at St. Luke's Lutheran Church (3215 Four Mile Road NE). Registration begins at 9:00 a.m. and the program ends at 3:00 p.m..

Celebration presents a great opportunity to learn about Camp Fire's history through the beads used in the Club Program. Afterwards, enjoy the many activities based on Camp Fire's five Trails.

For more information, call Ursula at 949 2500 ext, 28 or send an e-mail to club@campfireusawmc.org.

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