

# WILDERNESS CENTER SUMMIT



Diakon Wilderness Center ♦ 717-960-6700

Summer 2009

## New programs enhance center offerings

Two new programs are ensuring an exciting future for the Diakon Wilderness Center.

The Flight Program, a pilot program funded by a grant from the Pennsylvania Department of Health, is designed to help youths positively transition to adulthood (see story below). Ten young men from across central and eastern Pennsylvania have been accepted into the program. For the next year they will embark on a journey that will help them determine who they are, what they want to be, and what they need to do to get there.

In August, the Center Point Day Program will serve youths from Adams

and Cumberland counties who will receive academic training through the Capital Area Intermediate Unit, life-skills training as part of the center's competency-development curriculum, and workforce development skills through a combination of on-site training and use of community resources that help participants hone their skills and find jobs.

In other developments, the Female Empowerment Wilderness Challenge Program will re-open July 21 after a year-long hiatus. In 30 days, this one-of-a-kind program teaches young women how to work together, realize all they are capable of, and build the

self-confidence and security necessary for them to rise above negative influences and make decisions that are best for them.

Despite many of the trials and tribulations of the past year including the economy, changes in child-welfare trends, and fluctuations in governmental policies, the Weekend Alternative, Foundations Residential, Wilderness Challenge, and Bridge programs have continued to operate at high levels.

Developing new, innovative programming remains a cornerstone of the Wilderness Center's commitment to provide quality, beneficial services to youths from throughout Pennsylvania.

## Flight Program takes off at the Diakon Wilderness Center

The Diakon Wilderness Center has added the Flight Program to its offering of services for at-risk youths. With the assistance of state Department of Health funding, the Flight Program helps older youths make a positive transition to adulthood.

The program is available to any at-risk youth who voluntarily asks for additional help and support.

Counselors meet weekly with students in their own community to offer guidance, support, and encouragement, focusing on workforce development, independent living skills, completion of high school or a GED program, or enrollment in college or

a trade school, all while maintaining a drug- and alcohol-free lifestyle.

Additionally, all Flight students come together Friday afternoons through Saturday evenings to share their successes and prepare for the upcoming week. During these gatherings students:

- Attend lessons designed to broaden competency skills;
- Hear from guest speakers;
- Participate in adventure activities such as canoeing or rock climbing;
- Are exposed to new experiences such as attending a play or learning to fly-fish; and
- Have opportunities to go on wilderness treks.

Students later earn the opportunity to become positive peer-mentors to students currently participating in the Wilderness Center's various other programs. By telling their own stories and describing their challenges, Flight Program students help other teens facing similar struggles.

Throughout their one-year experience in the program, students can participate in national service and adventure trips, exposing them to new sites and cultures. Each student also has the opportunity to earn a laptop computer for his efforts throughout the program.



## Parents and kids reconnect on Family Day

Since September of 2007, the Foundations Residential Program has been offering an innovative family-unification service termed Family Day. These day-long events are held at least one Saturday every month. Typically, at least 50% of families of program participants have been in attendance, a level that has been steadily growing over the last two years.

A typical Family Day consists of activities with parents in the morning, allowing parents and staff to get to know each other, share experiences in raising their teenage sons, and performing educational exercises aimed at providing parents with new tools that might be effective when their sons return home.

During the afternoon, a family lunch

takes place, with activities focused on child-parent communication and relationship-building.

At the conclusion of Family Day, parents are asked to complete feedback forms that allow Diakon Wilderness Center staff to assess the effectiveness of the day and adjust activities to ensure effectiveness. Comments from parents have included:

- “I learned I am not alone in the struggle to raise a teenage kid.”
- “The most valuable part of my day was learning to communicate with my son.”
- “The most valuable part of my day is knowing my son is safe and being helped.”



## Excitement builds for annual student reunion

The ninth annual Diakon Wilderness Center student reunion is scheduled for noon to 5 p.m., Aug. 8. Participants will enjoy a hearty picnic lunch donated by Morrison Dining Services as former students and guests are welcomed, motivating speeches are delivered, and the annual Diakon Wilderness Center scholarship-award winners are announced.

The much-anticipated staff vs. student basketball game will follow the student reunion.

Former students and their families, caseworkers, probation officers, and other county officials are welcome to share in the spirit of the center on this special reunion day. For more information, please call the center at (717) 960-6700.

### 2008 DWC six-month follow-up survey results

104 total respondents	YES	NO
Still in post-discharge living environment	63%	37%
Re-entered placement	39%	61%
Received charges post-discharge	20%	80%
Enrolled in school	83%	17%
Six-month evaluation program effective	87%	13%