

Camp Deerpark

WINTER 2020

A MINISTRY OF THE NEW YORK CITY MENNONITE CHURCHES

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THE MEHR PROPERTY

On February 6, 2020 Camp Deerpark purchased the neighboring property that was formerly owned by Walter and Jacqueline Mehr.

When the owner of a house on Brandt Road discovered his new neighbors were running a summer camp for children from New York City, he put his house on the market. Prospective buyers, Walter and Jacqueline Mehr, drove from New York City to see the property around Labor Day in 1969. They drove past people enjoying a weekend retreat at the newly purchased Camp Deerpark, to look at a rambling, stone house built in 1810. "As soon as I saw it I fell in love with it," Walter said. "Before we left after that first visit, I said I'd buy the house. The owner asked me, 'Don't you want to negotiate price or something?' I said no."

When the Mehrs were in the final stages of the purchase of the house, the owner found out Walter and Jacqueline were Jewish and tried to stop the sale. The Mehrs prevailed and, along with their new house, purchased 300 acres of surrounding land. They moved from Park Avenue and 66th Street to the quiet setting on the hill on Brandt Road where they could look out of their window at night and see the eyes of many deer in the field across the road. "I loved the isolation," Walter said.

"I've always been happy with having camp as a neighbor. It made me happy to see children from the city spend two weeks in the country." The people have been very good neighbors. They always plow me out when it snows. Jim Baer would plow me out before he plowed at camp." (Forever God is Faithful, page 125)

Based on the close relationship between camp staff and Walter Mehr, Ken Bontrager had been named the executor of Walter's estate. In 2014 while the Bontragers were on sabbatical, Walter amended his will naming Bob Baxter, a family friend, as the executor. Being named the executor of one's estate is an honor and Ken felt a bit spurned.

As it turned out God had all things in control. Bob Baxter's roots were in Lancaster County where his grandfather had been a Mennonite pastor. He, of course, was committed to handling the estate with integrity, but he also would be happy to see Camp Deerpark end up with the Mehr property.

Soon after Walter passed on January 3, 2018 the 133.7 acre property was listed on the market at \$899,000. The May 19, 2018 camp board minutes read, "The board wishes to continue with caution and not to shut the door on this opportunity. It was agreed that

"I've always been happy with having camp as a neighbor. It made me happy to see children from the city spend two weeks in the country."

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Editor: Ken Bontrager

Continued on page 2

we still would like Ken to pursue getting our own appraisal of the property. We will continue in prayer for a significant gift given for the purchase, and that this land be used for God's glory and as a blessing to Camp Deerpark whether we own it or not." An independent appraisal estimated the Mehr property at \$762,500.

At an August 2018 board meeting the board agreed that camp should stay away from purchasing the house. It was decided to make a request to the estate to sell the land without the house. The estate was not able to separate the land. On October 20, 2018 the board decided that we would not make an offer on the property, but rather we would pray that someone would come forward who wanted to buy the house and not the land. It seemed like we were praying for an impossibility.

In the early spring of 2019 our neighbor Keith stopped in one afternoon and stated, "I want to buy Walter's house, but I don't want the land." In the weeks following, Keith and camp explored the possibility of forming a partnership to purchase the property, which borders camp to the east and Keith to the west. After more consideration Keith decided against purchasing the Mehr house. However, less than two weeks later another friend of Camp Deerpark, who wishes to remain anonymous, stepped forward to partner with camp to obtain the Mehr property. A legal partnership was formed and an offer made to the estate. We are currently in the process of sub-dividing the house and ten acres from the forest land after which the partnership will be dissolved. Camp Deerpark will end up with 125.77 acres at a cost of \$240,000 plus closing and sub-dividing costs.

Why More Land

Camp Deerpark currently owns 277 acres of land, most of which is forest and used only for hiking. It would not seem that more

forest land is needed. In 2007 before the housing bubble burst, a housing development was being proposed, and nearly approved, that would see more than 300 new homes within two miles of Camp Deerpark. There are currently seven homes on Brandt Road above Camp Deerpark making this a very quiet dead end road.

The Mehr property had been the Skinner family farm prior to the 1950s and would be the most buildable parcel of land on Brandt Road for a developer. Even ten additional houses would drastically affect the camper and guest experience here at camp. We also heard from several wise and longtime camp supporters who encouraged us to purchase. Their counsel was that neighboring property for sale is something that only happens once in a lifetime.

Why Not the House

When the original Mehr house burned in 1985 Walter and Jacqueline built a beautiful three story post and beam home. They designed their new home with large living and hosting spaces and relatively limited bedroom space. Today the 35 year old house is in livable condition, but there are numerous maintenance issues that would need to be corrected before Camp Deerpark could use it as a retreat lodge for guests. At this time the house does not fit into any program needs at Camp Deerpark.

We are grateful to Keith, our anonymous partner, and to Bob Baxter for all of his diligent work in this process. We continue to remember Walter and Jacqueline with fondness. If you have any questions please contact Ken at deerparkdirector@gmail.com. This is a huge step of faith for Camp Deerpark. A step that the board has unanimously embraced.



In the late fall Nancy Reichert observed this view as she was leaving work for the day. It appeared as though the other end of the rainbow settled over Promise Woods. We continue to trust God's provision for the construction project and the Mehr property.

In December several camp staff joined Braedon Halpin in completing his Eagle Scout project. With help from family and friends Braedon designed and built two bridges in the Port Jervis water shed area. Braedon is a senior at Port Jervis High School and works for Sean in maintenance after school.





Top to bottom:

On a warm October day five young men from the Bellvale Bruderhof Community stripped and re-roofed motel 2-4. We are grateful for their work and generous spirit.

During the week of February 17-22, Les Mininger and Jim Landis from Mellingers Mennonite Church helped Ben and Leonard install the ceiling in the Promise Woods program center. The gap between boards is designed to absorb sound in what will certainly be a lively dining room.

On February 22 more than 25 men from Evangelical Garifuna Manhattan installed the wall insulation in the program center. They also formed three painting crews, installed wall board in the kitchen, and cleaned up piles of brush. It seems as though we did a month of work in one day.

If you are interested in helping with construction please contact Ben at deerparkcabins@gmail.com

UPCOMING EVENTS

APRIL BANQUET POSTPONED

NEW DATE:

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 25, 2020

SHADY MAPLE RESTAURANT - EAST EARL, PA

Please call 845-754-8669
or email deerparkguests@gmail.com
to register for this event.

THE NUMBERS

In 2019 Camp Deerpark hosted
110 retreat groups for a total of
5,920 retreat days.

6 sessions of
children's camp with a
total of **1,420** camper days.
424 volunteers working
8,502.5 volunteer hours.

REMEMBERING EVELYN BROWN

Evelyn passed away on February 15, 2020 at age 93. She had lived the last five years of her life with her daughter, Verbena, near Miami, FL. Evelyn served on the Camp Deerark board from 1975-78 and again from 1983-84. She was a long time member of Seventh Avenue Mennonite Church. A scholarship fund is being established in Evelyn's memory.

QCD

A special opportunity to be generous exists for people over the age of 70½ who have a traditional IRA. People who fit this description can make charitable distributions from their traditional IRAs directly to Camp Deerpark. This is considered a qualified charitable distribution, otherwise known as a QCD. By making a QCD from your traditional IRA, you can avoid reporting the distribution as income on your taxes. This lowers your overall income to be taxed. For more information contact Everence at 800-348-7468.

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Continued on page 8

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Steve & Irene Villanueva

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In Honor of the Pease Family, Kendell & Karon
Dan & Marlene Miller

In Honor of the Wedding of Glenn Smith & Mary Ann Ruth
Jack & Diane Pechart

In Honor of Glenn & Anne Weaver
David Weaver

THANK YOU!

To ALL of the 2019
volunteers and donors!

WISH LIST

- ☐ Stuffed chair and roll out ottoman for six (6) Promise Woods motels - \$360 each
- ☐ Canon EOS Rebel SL2 Camera and Canon Accessories - \$599
- ☐ 6 Gallon, 150 PSI Portable Electric Pancake Air Compressor (\$125)
- ☐ Rebuild existing gaga pit (\$1,400)
- ☐ Golf Cart with Bed (Used \$4,000)



Camp Deepark is owned by the Mennonite Churches of New York City.

P.O. Box 394
Westbrookville, NY 12785
(845) 754-8669
Email: info@campdeepark.org
www.campdeepark.org



2020 SUMMER CAMP SCHEDULE

SESSIONS	DATES	COSTS
Children's Camp Session 1	June 28-July 3	\$200-300*
Children's Camp Session 2 & Teen Discipleship A	July 5-10	\$200-300*
Children's Camp Session 3 & Teen Discipleship B	July 12-17	\$200-300*
Children's Camp Session 4 & Teen Discipleship C	July 19-24	\$200-300*
Children's Camp Session 5	July 26-31	\$200-300*
Teen Camp & L.E.A.D #1	August 2-7	\$200-300*
Family Camp Programmed & L.E.A.D #2	August 17-20	\$450/family
Family Camp Unprogrammed	August 24-27	\$450/family

Summer Camp Discounts (This does not include L.E.A.D.)

**Based on when registration and payment are received in the office:*

- \$200/week if received in February or March
- \$250/week if received in April or May
- \$300/week if received in June.

Register online at www.campdeepark.org or call the office for a paper registration.

The cost of Family Camp and LEAD are not the same as summer children's camp.