

Camp Deerpark

FALL 2023

A MINISTRY OF THE NEW YORK CITY MENNONITE CHURCHES

CAMP DEERPARK OWNER CHURCHES

Believers Mennonite Garifuna Ministries
Pastor Andrew Nuñez

Centro Misionero Cristiano
Pastor Aristidez Shee

Evangelical Garifuna Church
Pastor Lilian Flores
Retired Pastor Celso Jaime

Evangelical Garifuna Church of Brooklyn
Pastor Martin Alvarez

Evangelical Garifuna Church of Manhattan
Pastor Margarito Martinez

Friendship Community Church
Pastor Kenneth L. Thompson

Grace and Peace Mennonite Church
Pastor Anita Castle

Iglesia Evangelical Menonita Eben-Ezer
Pastors Julio and Ana Damaso

Immanuel Community Church
Pastor Mark Perri

Infinity Mennonite Church
Pastor Albert Taylor

King of Glory Tabernacle
Pastor Robert Earl

Manhattan Mennonite Fellowship
Pastor Jason Storbakken

Mennonite Bible Fellowship, CT
Pastor Cedric Smith

Mennonite Evangelistic Tabernacle
Pastor Nestalis DeLeon

Muros de Fuegos
Pastor Maria Teresa Flores

North Bronx Mennonite Church
Pastor Ruth Wenger

United Revival Mennonite Church
Bishop Nicolas Angustia

Valley of Jesus Mennonite Church
Pastors Bernardo & Linda Rodriguez

STAFFING TRANSITIONS

Kevin Smith, Operations Director

"For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." Jeremiah 29:11

During this time of transition here at camp, this verse rings loud in my heart. As we look towards the future it brings me delight knowing that God still has plans for Camp Deerpark. God still has plans for Ken, Deborah and the Bontrager family. God still has so many plans for our current, new and former staff members. And God has plans for me.

As I transition into Operations Director, I am reenergized and honored that God has allowed me to be a part of the beautiful mission of Camp Deerpark. To be a missionary with passionate staff to help create an environment of pure serenity and leadership opportunities for our energetic summer camp and for our evangelistic churches. Please keep camp, our churches and our staff in your prayers as we move into the next chapter of Camp Deerpark. I am excited to know that God has plans to prosper us and He gave us unmovable hope and a powerful future for the Glory of Him!

Celmali Jaime Okonji, Program Director



Celmali, Moses, Jabezzi, and Jericho Okonji will continue to make their home in Nairobi where Moses is the pastor of Inspiration Centre Mathare. They will spend their summer at Camp Deerpark.

It sure feels good to be back. More than a decade ago I served as Summer Program Director. I was fresh out of college and bursting at the seams of life with energy. I had so much fun I signed up for a second year, and to be completely honest, I've been waiting ever since for God to open up the window of opportunity once more. This time around, with a husband and two kids in tow, I'm at it again. While my energy levels may not be at their peak, my wisdom has increased, and I'm asking God to grant everything that's needed to oversee the details of the summer program at Camp Deerpark again. I'm bringing all my

DEAR CAMP DEERPARK CONSTITUENTS,

Camp Deerpark has been a place of peace and renewal for all of us over the years. We all have sweet memories of meeting God and enjoying nature in this beautiful sanctuary. It is difficult to think that it could also be a place of conflict. However, conflict is part of doing life together, and from the Bible stories of Lot and Abraham all the way to Paul and Silas, we see that there are times that conflict reaches a breaking point where parties choose to part ways. In recent months, some situations arose that caused tension and dysfunction among the staff. The board spent time listening to all involved and, with the information that was presented, attempted to come to a resolution that would be acceptable to all. Unfortunately, we were not able to come to a conclusion that satisfied everyone, and some staff chose to resign from their positions at Camp Deerpark as a result of this process: Sean and Kim McConaghay, Kenton Baer, and Wendell and Carissa Baer.

Although our ultimate goal was biblical reconciliation, forgiveness, and restoration of relationships, there was miscommunication and hurt that occurred in this process and we fell short of that goal. We are saddened at the outcome, but we wish these staff the best as they venture into the next season of their lives. We would like to extend our deep gratitude to them for the time they spent at camp and their service to the Camp Deerpark community, and we are still praying for reconciliation and restoration of relationships in the future. Sean and Kim McConaghay served at camp for 17 years in the areas of maintenance, housekeeping, and construction, and also played an important role in making maple syrup each year. Kenton Baer, and Wendell and Carissa Baer have also been an integral part of the larger Camp Deerpark community for many years and have spent time as volunteers before being on staff in the areas of construction, maintenance, housekeeping, and weekend dining room support. We are so grateful for all of their contributions.

Since the departure of these valuable members of the Camp Deerpark staff, the board has examined the staff structure and some changes have been made. One of these changes is the addition of the role of Operations Director, a position that

will focus on staffing and operations and will relieve some responsibilities from the Executive Director. We are excited to announce that Kevin Smith has agreed to become the Operations Director and made the transition from his previous role of Program Director in early October. We look forward to seeing Kevin continue to use his gifts at Camp Deerpark and anticipate the new ways that God may use him in this role.

With the loss of several staff and Kevin's transition to a new role, some critical roles at Camp Deerpark were empty, and we continue to see how "God is faithful" as he has provided for these needs. The Program Director role will be filled by Celmali Jaime Okonji, a former camper and summer staff member, who is also the daughter of Pastor Celso Jaime, the retired pastor of Evangelical Garifuna Church in the Bronx. Celmali currently lives in Kenya with her husband and children, so she will perform her duties primarily remotely during the year, and will travel to Camp Deerpark for the summer to direct the summer camp programs. We also are grateful that there have been several people who have stepped in to help with facilities and maintenance needs throughout the last few months and God continues to provide people to fill these needs.

We recognize there are many changes occurring in a short amount of time, and the board is available for any questions or concerns. Please feel free to reach out to any board member if there is something you would like to discuss. While this year has been very difficult for the staff and the board, we continue to see how God is faithful in bringing hope to difficult situations and making a way where there seems to be no way. Praise God with us for his provision in allowing Kevin to transition to a new role, and for the others who have been able to step in to fill vacant roles! And, as always, please continue to pray for Camp Deerpark and the work being done here to bring glory to God. Thank you so much for your support.

Sincerely,
The Camp Deerpark Board

THANK YOU!

Thanks to the efforts of the Bowmansville Mennonite Youth and the Mercersburg Mennonite Youth all of the standing dead ash trees have been removed from the Children's Forest. It currently doesn't look very good, but it is safe. The Emerald Ash Borer has pretty much eliminated all of the ash trees at Camp Deerpark. We will continue to treat the three large ash trees in the field below the gazebo in an attempt to save them. We are told there are no guarantees.



creativity, connections, and ideas, and I'm waiting on God to do His work through me.

This summer's theme is "Meet Me at the Mountain." What? Who? Allow me to explain... The "Me" in the theme refers to God, not me, Celmal. The vision is to have every person who steps foot on the mountain (Camp Deerpark) to have an encounter with Jesus. Now wouldn't that be something? Think about stuttering Moses at the burning bush, or Abraham encountering a ram after a long, difficult hike. What about Jesus on the Mount of Beatitudes, and later at mount Calvary? Mountains represent big, and oftentimes difficult, situations in life where God wants to meet us. The theme verse is Matthew 17:20: "Truly I tell you, if you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'move from here to there,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you." I wait in expectation to see campers step off the bus from the city with all their heavy baggage and burdens. There is nothing much too difficult that we might have that Jesus cannot carry. I know this summer lives will be changed, and oh, I am so ready for the encounter.

"God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference."

THANK YOU!



Big thanks to the twenty men from Evangelical Garifuna Manhattan who spent October 28th working at camp. They raked and planted grass in the parking area below the cemetery and shoveled up the grass on the volleyball court. We are always grateful for the joyful spirit and hard work of the Garifuna men.



A crew of young men led by Kevin Oberholzer have taken on the task of building bunk beds for cabin #2 Wisdom. They started with a stack of rough cut pine in October, have most of the pieces constructed in December, and plan to come back in January for final assembly. Thanks to Kevin, Zach, Trent, Will, Stephen, and Kenneth.

SOLAR OPPORTUNITY

Solar at Promise Woods Giving Opportunity
This fall Camp Deerpark is exploring the possibility of installing solar in Promise Woods. There are new policies at the state and federal level offering incentives for non-profits.

We have received a quote from a highly reputable company for \$49,800.

We currently have a gift of \$44,000 toward our goal. If it would bring you joy to help cover the final \$5800, please reach out to us at deerparkdirector@gmail.com.

NEW CONTACT INFORMATION

Kevin Smith, Operations Director
deerparkoperationsdirector@gmail.com
845-978-7055

Celmal Jaime Okonji, Program Director
deerparkprogram@gmail.com
Facetime or WhatsApp: 845-283-2041

Janice Barrett, Guests Services Coordinator
deerparkguests@gmail.com
215-934-0513

Please note guests@campdeerpark.org is no longer a functioning email.

Ken's personal email as he moves into retirement
kenbontrager63@gmail.com

HOMECOMING AUCTION REPORT

Thank you to all who helped support the ministry of Camp Deerpark at our annual Homecoming Auction on September 9th, 2023. While we fell short of our goal of raising \$39,000 in contributions, we praise God for all of the gifts received. The total net proceeds for the day were: \$20,416.80. Our attendance was lower than expected due to a dismal weather forecast and a bus that was not able to bring folks from Infinity Mennonite. We are also grateful to the Hahn Family Foundation who chose to honor their gift of \$5000 even though we did not meet our goal.



In the afternoon of Homecoming, a group of folks including members of the Monroe and Rachel Yoder family and members of Atlantic Coast Conference Churches in New York gathered to dedicate cabin #2 Wisdom. Rachel's great granddaughter and namesake took on the task of handing programs to each one present. The dedication was informal, yet deeply meaningful. Thank you, Ruth Wenger, for your words of challenge and encouragement. Thank you, Anita Castle, for leading our singing.

Editor: Ken Bontrager

The newsletter is published four times a year and is distributed without charge to members and friends.



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

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WISH LIST

Weekend food service and hosting volunteers.

For more info contact Ashley at deerparkofficestaff@gmail.com

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MARK YOUR CALENDAR

Pennsylvania Banquet at Shady Maple

April 5, 2024

Homecoming Auction at Camp Deerpark

September 7, 2024

SAVE A TREE!

Would you like to receive your newsletter by email? Printing and mailing newsletters can become costly. It is cheaper, greener and easier to receive newsletters via email. If you're interested, send your email address to guests@campdeerpark.org or call 845-754-8669.

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