



Ted Shockley Photo

Mish Hood started at YMCA Camp Silver Beach as a counselor in 2001 and has served as the camp's program director since then. Born and raised in Scotland, he earned a college degree in 2006 but returned to the Eastern Shore. "It is the job I have been looking for," he said.

International flair

At YMCA camp, counselors, youth come from all over

By Ceri Larson Danes
Staff writer

JAMESVILLE — Camp Silver Beach here is one of the Shore's best-kept secrets, and its strongly international flavor may be even lesser known to locals.

Opened in 1999 by the South Hampton Roads YMCA, the 150-acre facility hosts thousands of kids each summer and about 100 counselors, 40 percent of whom come from outside the United States.

Some of the campers are foreign, too, hailing this year from France, Russia, Saudi Arabia and Spain, though the majority come from within a

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six-hour drive of the Shore and predominantly from Virginia, said Executive Director Dan Credle.

"I think the YMCA is an international movement," he said, "and our particular association of South Hampton Roads has a partnership with the YMCA in Sao Paulo, Brazil."

This year's crew of international counselors represents 12 different countries — Albania, Russia, Croatia, Ukraine,

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Dan Credle is executive director of YMCA Camp Silver Beach. "I think the YMCA is an international movement," he said.

YMCA

From front

Scotland, England, France, South Korea, Thailand, Australia, Paraguay and Brazil.

Since it opened, the camp has hired counselors from 33 foreign countries around the globe, from Iceland to Zimbabwe and from China to Peru.

"I think it provides a better world view for the children," Credle said of the varied staff. "It is better for them to learn to interact with people from all over the world. That is the world we live in."

It's a process that starts as soon as campers drop their bags at their dorm.

Camp passport

A creative "passport" program serves as orientation for children, each of whom is given a passport and a map delineating areas as various countries.

Manned by counselors from their respective countries, some don traditional dress, the sites are decked out in national flags and campers get a taste of the prevailing language and culture.

Their passports are stamped once they locate the country and learn about it, then move on to the next. They're not only getting first-hand information about countries some of them may not even have heard of yet, but they are also learning the layout of the camp.

"We try to make the experience as beneficial for the camper as possible," Credle said, and he has plenty of experience to draw on. He's worked with YMCA professional camping for 25 years and has run three multi-million dollar operations, including Camp Silver Beach.

Two ranking counselors have ensured that campers get a healthy dose of their own native Scotland.

Mish Hood started as a

Camp's recruitment efforts are diverse — and financially inclusive

By Ceri Larson Danes

Staff writer

JAMESVILLE — Camp Silver Beach near here is located here on the Eastern Shore, but it is used by families and groups far beyond these borders — attracting counselors from 33 countries over nine years and campers from 21 states and four other countries this year.

"We don't target the Eastern Shore anymore than we target South Hampton Roads," said Executive Director Dan Credle.

Camp personnel participate in major local events like the annual Seafood Festival on Chincoteague and the Harvest Festival at Kiptopeke.

"From January to Mid-March we are on the road recruiting counselors and campers," Credle said.

The camp will celebrate its 10th anniversary next year and Credle has been there since the beginning, bunking in the office during construction.

"Ninety-five percent of kids are going to come from a distance not

more than 6 hours away," he said. "Probably 80 percent of our children are from an even more narrow radius, from the Hampton Roads area up to Williamsburg and Richmond."

This year, 83 percent of campers were Virginians.

"Our goal is not to turn any child away ever because of financial assistance, but we do run out of space," Credle said, adding that about 10 percent of campers receive some aid, the majority of it staying in the state because "our goal is to provide assistance where the money is raised."

More than 500 scholarships have been awarded in the past three years, increasing each year and totaling \$350,000.

Eastern Shore families were awarded 26 scholarships this year totaling \$19,000. Credle said families are encouraged to contribute any amount they can handle, because it makes the experience more meaningful for them.

Go to www.campsilverbeach.org or call 442-4634 for more information.

counselor in 2001 and has served as the camp's program director since then. Born and raised in Glasgow, he attended university in Edinburgh, receiving a business degree in 2006.

"It is the job I have been looking for for years," Hood said. "I wanted this job," he said, because he "would rather be helping make a difference for kids than sitting behind a desk."

He and Richard Grieves, the teen camp director and also a Scot, are responsible for an evening of Scottish tradition held on the last night of teen camp for the older campers — rising freshmen, sophomores and juniors who stay for a three-week stretch each year.

It's called a Ceilidh (pronounced KEY-LEE) — a night of dance and toasts and a celebration of Scotland's most beloved poet, Robert Burns.

Another feature isn't entirely popular even in

Scotland, but Grieves said the teen group, whose last day was July 12, thoroughly enjoyed the native meal of Haggis.

Served with "tatties and neeps" — that's mashed potatoes and turnips — Haggis is a sausage-like speciality made by cooking the heart, lungs and liver of a sheep, along with toasted oatmeal, stuffing it into the sheep's stomach and then boiling it for hours.

There's typically a reading of Robert Burns poetry, and "the toast of the laddies and the toast of the lassies," which Grieves said is seasoned with healthy sarcasm, "and then they get out there and dance."

Grieves and Hood teach them the steps of the traditional dance, creating memories many will carry with them for a lifetime.

Life preparation

Senior Program Director Andy Ballard also has been working

with the camp since 2001 and said it is the camp philosophy to create life-changing moments.

Another goal is to have the campers return the following year.

"It's not a business goal," he said, "it's a life goal — to prepare for high school and decision-making choices; to prepare people for that decision and healthy independence away from their parents."

The camp has a volunteer medical staff of one doctor and four nurses on-site 24/7 who rotate with each weekly session — meaning at least 10 doctors and 40 nurses volunteer each summer.

"The American Camping Association only requires a person on staff with advanced first-aid training," Credle said. "It is very reassuring for families to know

that we have this level of medical staff."

The camp has steadily increased enrollment each year and this year's enrollment — 2,018 — is the highest ever.

Though increasingly popular, there are usually open bed spaces in each session.

That's good luck for campers who ask to spend another week, which Credle said is common.

One 13-year-old girl from Hampton Roads stayed six weeks, he said, and then came back to visit on two occasions when friends came to camp.

A maximum of 10 campers are divided into 12-person cottages with two counselors. They're grouped by age in separate girls' and boys' areas. Half of them spend the morning at land activities like field sports, riflery, archery, the Alpine Tower, dance, martial arts, drama and crafts.

The others head for the water, enjoying the pool with its 90-foot Wet Willie slide or taking in water sports on the Chesapeake Bay — everything from sailing and kayaking to waterskiing, tubing, wakeboarding and more.

In the afternoon, the morning's landlubbers head for the water and the waterlogged switch to dry-land activities.

"The camp is one big loop and the campers follow the loop," Hood said. "The whole system is designed for decision making — their experiences depend on their decisions."

When not in session the camp is used for business conferences, corporate retreats and special events. Four hundred girl-scouts will descend on the camp after the regular sessions end later this month.