

Dear Ones

Every year, the best thing I get to do is work with Tallahassee Parks, Recreation and Neighborhood Affairs to plan for Jesse's camps and then when it's over, I have the pleasure of sharing it with you. I hope you enjoy reading about our week, seeing the joy and wonder of it all in our campers' faces, and know that your love and support have made this possible. Thank you for what we have created and thank you for helping me honor my beloved son in such a meaningful and delightful way.

Jesse's Camps 2025

In spite of Monday's rainy, chilly morning, there was nothing dreary about our first day of Jesse's camps. My heart was filled with joy on Friday when Donna Dillon (who raises funds for this), Chris Franzetti and I shopped for fresh fruits, veggies, cheese, and snacks to add to our already planned menus. Greg and I sorted everything by site, and then bright and early, wonderful neighbors loaded our goods onto Greg's truck to be delivered to Walker-Ford community center. More campers were registered than before and even those numbers grew a bit with close to 250 youngsters joining us this time. Additional part-time staff were added to accommodate the growth. Couldn't be happier.

Our special guest speaker this year was Akhenaton ("AK") Thomas, aide to Commissioner Curtis Richardson. AK is dedicated to mentorship and was Tallahassee's representative for President Obama's My Brother's Keeper. In his own words, he is "passionate about education and serves as a Professor of History and Government at FAMU, focusing on Black history and leadership." He is the Associate Executive Director of the Omega Lamplighters and mentors young men in our community. Mr. Thomas engaged our campers in a lively discussion about government, its leaders, and its many services. He also spoke with them about how to be a good citizen and what makes for a good leader. When he asked the group what they would do if they were Mayor for a day, the responses ranged from having a wide variety of parties to more serious responses such as getting rid of trash, cleaning our waterways, and helping those who are homeless. Thank you, AK, for your inspiration.

Returning this year was Stan Rosenthal, a UF/IFAS Extension Forestry Agent Emeritus. He is also a senior forester both for Natural Resources Planning Services and for the Florida Wildlife Federation in urban and rural forestry. Mr. Rosenthal led a group of campers at LeVerne Payne on a "Walk in the Woods" to learn about tree identification. Before going to the great outdoors, Stan and his group had a discussion about trees. They listed how trees provide things we depend on including: wood, food, oxygen, shade, fruit, flowers, color, beauty, wildlife habitat, shelter for humans and fun places to climb. With all that in mind, Stan led us from one tree to the next taking time to talk about each tree, the name of each, and showing us its special fruits, nuts, or gumballs. We even learned about the tree's root system including how deep and long. Our group was made up of older campers who enjoy science, and some are taking STEM classes.

One camper impressed all of us by knowing the answer to, "What is the process trees use that begins with "PH?" Her answer: photosynthesis. Thank you, Stan, for the great morning walk loaded with information to make future walks more interesting.

We welcomed back Dr. Allyson Royal and her group of musicians from the Tallahassee Symphony Orchestra. This time, we were treated to the music of 1 viola, 2 violins, and 1 cello. We heard both classical music and a contemporary piece which the campers knew from Pokémon. Each musician talked about their instrument and played something to demonstrate its unique qualities. It's thrilling to see the campers' reaction to music and to hear their questions. The most exciting part of this session is enjoying their "petting zoo" which gives each camper the experience of touching each instrument, holding the bow, and getting instruction on how to play each instrument. What a thrill! Thank you, Dr. Royal!

New this year to Jesse's Camps was a music session led by Dr. Carrie Danielson of FSU's College of Music. This semester, Lawrence Gregory community center and FSU College of Music are partnering with Dr. Danielson's new class ("Music, Communities, and Sustainability") to form the FSU/LGCC Afterschool Music Collective. They are learning ukulele, guitar, bucket drumming and other music activities. There will be a field trip to FSU soon to visit their recording studio. We were delighted this coincided with Jesse's Camps.

In addition to our special programs, there were also all kinds of field trips to a variety of in-town locations. Our campers enjoyed bowling, went to Chuck-E-Cheese, some took a hike at Leon Sinks, they learned about our solar system at the Challenger Learning Center, and some went to the Tallahassee Museum (always in my mind as the Junior Museum) and were treated to seeing the black bear running on a cool morning and enjoyed the wolves being out and about.

The week ended with a daylong festival with all our campers gathered at the Jack McLean community center. The day was filled with cooperative games like a sponge bucket relay balloon tap relay, basketball hoops shooting, and water balloon tosses. There were also indoor games as well.

Each year, I am touched by new things I learn about our community centers and how much they contribute to our community. This year I learned about the counselors in training (CIT) program for those who are 12 or 13 years old. They can participate in our camp week activities as a CIT and then at some point in time can be hired by the City to be Counselors for the City sponsored camps. Three of our campers were CITs this year. In addition, I learned that one of our staff works with young people with autism and helps teach job skills so they can enter the working world. Two young people from his program were also working at Jesse's Camps this year. I love knowing this.

This was a very special year to me because it marks the 15th year I have worked with the Ashley Edwards, director of Tallahassee Parks, Recreation and Neighborhood Affairs and her incredible staff. It is our 12th year of having Jesse's Camps. I am always amazed by how this dream has grown into this most remarkable program, and I am so in awe of how those who staff our community centers give it the thoughtful love, attention, and enthusiasm to make it shine as it does. Because of this, this year will be our first time hosting a staff appreciation luncheon to honor their work. Several who have supported Jesse's Camps from the very beginning agreed to earmark their donation for this specific purpose this year. You must know how deeply grateful I am for this.

I want to say a special thank you to my band mates in the Elsinore Sewing Club. In addition to having played at our camps before, they so generously donated the fee from a gig to Jesse's Camps. Thank you Madelon Horwich, Laura Rush, Emily Beck, Lisa Baroody, Peggy Cabe, and Veronica Donnelly!

This was also the first year we received a community grant donation from Publix Market Charities and their special logo for this is attached.

Remember, your donations can be made throughout the year. Send your check (made payable to FOOP/Jesse's Camps) to Friends of Our Parks, c/o TPRNA, 1201 Myers Park Drive, Tallahassee, FL 32301. And visit our website to learn more about what we do at <https://www.talgov.com/parks/JesseCorreiaMemorialScholarship>

With a heart filled with deep love and gratitude,

Martha Weinstein
Founder of Jesse's Camps and Jesse's Mom

