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Headlines

A Camp Where Everyone Learns to Love

By [VINCE LUECKE](#)
Editor

Special-needs campers at Anderson Woods are welcomed, nurtured by big-hearted staff. Counselors say campers teach them lessons, too.



Anderson Woods is quiet again. The sentinel-like pines that tower over the rolling farm and summer camp whisper in the wind but absent is the laughter of children fishing under a setting sun. Gone, too, are the dining-room chatter and the giggles of adults admiring newly made tie-dyed shirts drying in the breeze.

Friends for the summer: Anderson Woods camper Natalie Roth falls into the arms of counselor Shanti Knight during a conversation about celebrities during a quiet July evening. Roth participates in several camp sessions during the summer and developed a close friendship with Knight. "I know she likes me," Roth said with confidence. Photos by [Vince Luecke](#)

The cadre of campers are back at their homes and Anderson Woods' staff, young men and women like Isaac Gatwood and Megan Keusch, are caught up in work at high school and college. As fall takes hold and winter nears, Anderson Woods is at rest, but memories last far longer than the fleeting weeks of summer and the experience of Anderson Woods' 2006 season are etched deeply in the minds of its campers and staff. They'll never fully fade, even as new memories are made next year.

Anderson Woods is a special place for special people. David and Judy Colby opened their farm east of Adyeville as a camp for children with physical and mental disabilities back in 1978 and hundreds of campers have called the farm home for a week during the summer.

Some campers have been visiting for most of their lives, Judy Colby says from the front porch of the dining hall. "They never forget the experience. It's always with them. Years and years later, they talk about their time here."

She and David live in a cabin on the farm and their summers revolve around the camp and its staff of dedicated young people. Counselors share the Colbys' love of helping others. Like the campers they serve, many on the staff return every year.

This summer was Gatwood's sixth at Anderson Woods, but his first as camp director. Why does the 20-year-old return year after year to help campers shower and dress themselves - chores of a personal nature few people his age experience?

"It's taught me to slow

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Online Poll

To what degree, if any, has the change from daylight-saving to standard time affected you?

- None at all
- A little
- A moderate degree
- A great degree

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Left photo, Anderson Woods counselor Wes Powell gets help washing dishes from Zach Beckman. Campers are encouraged to help with some chores, part of Anderson Woods' goal to help people with mental and physical disabilities become, as much as possible, full members of their communities. Right photo, fishing is a popular activity for children and adult campers at Anderson Woods, located east of Adyeville. Counselors provide enrichment and recreational activities, including games, crafts and songs.

experience, says Wes Powers, a four-year veteran working the kitchen detail on a July Wednesday evening with camper Zach Beckman and fellow counselor Shanti Knight. "I've learned more about myself and the value of others," Powers explains, as Beckman begs him to hurry. Other campers outside are going fishing and the camper doesn't want to miss out.

Knight began working as a camp volunteer at the age of 9, making the 2006 camping season her seventh. She continues to learn from the children, men and women she works with, calling the experience of caring for others with special needs "so wonderful."

Hidden from view by its rural location, Anderson Woods seldom makes news. That changed early in the summer when an autistic camper walked away. Volunteers from the community rallied and the teen was found safe and sound several hours later.

Judy Colby, who gave interviews to TV journalists arriving at the camp's entrance, took the opportunity to share the camp's mission: helping people with physical and mental disabilities lead lives as full as they can be. She even invited a TV crew back to see what was happening at the camp later in the week.

Anderson Woods will open for its 30th season in 2007. The organization, which also operates permanent residential homes for people with disabilities, is governed by a board of directors. Opportunities for volunteering are available throughout the year. For more information, call (812) 357-2325 or visit <http://www.andersonwoods.org/>.

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down and reflect on my life and the lives of others," he says. "It's a hard job sometimes, but one that gives me humility and patience."

Counselors' work is constant during the four days campers are in residence. Like others away from the peace and security of home, campers sometimes face homesickness and worry about being away from family.

"We try to keep everyone busy and having as much fun as possible. The more they are involved, the more they enjoy the