

New directors fiercely committed to camp



Olivia Corya/The Herald

Anderson Woods camper Greg Scheller of Evansville chatted with Megan Gatwood of Jasper during the summer camp for people with mental and physical disabilities in Bristow on July 25. Gatwood, who has volunteered at the camp for eight years, and her husband, Isaac, are the new executive co-directors of the camp, for which a fundraiser will be held in Jasper on Saturday.

By JOHN SEASLY

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For Judy and Dave Colby, Anderson Woods has been a labor of love. Their faith-based summer camp in Perry County for children and adults with mental and physical disabilities has grown from just three campers in 1977 to 200 in 2012.

Dave, 75, and Judy, 73, have remained extremely active in Anderson Woods' operation, but don't have the physical energy they used to, Dave said. This past summer, the camp was run not by the Colbys but by Megan and Isaac Gatwood, who were appointed executive co-directors of the camp in the spring.

“We are still very much involved,” said Judy, the nonprofit’s president and CEO, “but they are now going to be doing the day-to-day.”

On Saturday, Anderson Woods is holding its sixth annual tasters fest, a major fundraiser for all aspects of the nonprofit. In addition to the camp, Anderson Woods operates Owl House, a residential home in Jasper for people with disabilities.

The Gatwoods, who served at the camp for years and met each other there, have made the camp their life’s commitment.

“When we knew we were going to get married, we wanted to start a camp of our own,” said Isaac, who married Megan in June 2009.

Once they entertained the idea of running a camp, they considered staying at Anderson Woods. The same year they got married they approached the Colbys about taking over the running of the Anderson Woods camp.

“Everywhere they looked and thought about camp, they saw Anderson Woods,” Judy said. “We knew they were committed, just fiercely committed. There’s no doubt in my mind that they’ll be here forever.”

For the next three years, the Gatwoods trained, learning to take on the responsibilities of the camp. They’ll probably train for another three years before they know the ropes completely, Judy said.

“I refer to it as, ‘OK, you’ve got the next 50 years,’” Dave said.

The Gatwoods, both 26, are no strangers to camp life. Isaac, who grew up in Birdseye just minutes from the camp, started working there as a groundskeeper when he was 15. The former Megan Keusch of Jasper started as a counselor at 19. For both of them, the experiences were transformative.

“Everyone thinks we help them and I guess we do,” Megan said, “but really it’s a give-and-take friendship at camp.” Megan, who taught special education for four years, said the campers teach her more than she can teach them.

Isaac is in residency at Deaconess Hospital in Evansville, studying to be a family physician. Megan is at home in Jasper, taking care of their 6-month-old daughter, Eve, but she eventually plans to return to work. Their camp positions are unpaid, and the Gatwoods must be able to support themselves financially. They return to the camp year after year both for the place itself and also because of their relationships with the campers.

“The campers particularly, they really have become our family,” Megan said. “We can’t imagine a summer without seeing these people. They’re our friends.”