

# Camp C.O.P.E.: Putting the pieces back together

Military families come together for encouragement, healing during program at Mo-Ranch

As her five-year-old daughter falls asleep in her lap, Jeane Sunshine tells a story that reflects what happens too often to the military families that bear the burden of our nation's wars.

Her husband suffered a serious brain injury while serving in Iraq. He received excellent medical care — was even in the same unit at Walter Reed Army Hospital when ABC News anchor Bob Woodruff was there recovering from his head wound. But the man who came back was very different from the man who left to serve his country.

"He was never the same," she said, tearing up as she recalled his return and what has become of their family since.

Her husband's erratic behavior eventually led to his discharge from the Army. He moved the family — Sunshine, their daughter and four sons

— from San Antonio to Louisiana, then filed for divorce a few months later.

Sunshine grew up as an "Army brat" then married a soldier, so the only life she knew revolved around living on or near a military base. Separated from that familiar environment and old friends, she has had to make ends meet and raise her kids as best she can. Co-workers and her church provide some support.

And there's Camp C.O.P.E. Two Dallas therapists started the program eight years ago to help children and teens deal with the stresses caused by having parents repeatedly sent overseas with the military — and then having them return injured or emotionally changed. Room and board is provided for qualifying families. And there's even a bus for Fort Hood-area residents and travel assistance for others.

Sunshine and her kids were among more than 300 youth and adults who attended the fourth Camp C.O.P.E. weekend at Presbyterian Mo-Ranch Assembly on May 18-20. The children and teens, who numbered almost 150, spent Saturday morning in small groups, arranged by ages and parents' circumstances. Professional counselors and volunteer assistants led them through exercises that helped them talk about their experiences and feelings and provided advice on how to continue dealing with their issues. While the youth were meeting, parents were invited to participate in sessions on relationship enrichment and parenting.

Saturday afternoon, the parents and youth roamed the 500-acre conference center, engaging in a variety of free-time activities, from zooming along the zip line to riding down the river



Courtesy photo

Enjoying the riverside barbecue at Mo-Ranch are Sara Bravo, left, with her daughter, Olivia, and Elizabeth Reep, right, with her son, Sawyer. Bravo and Reep co-founded Camp C.O.P.E. in 2004.

slide. Barbecue dinner, served beside the river under a pecan grove, was winding down as Sunshine talked

about the camp. Her daughter, tired from running and swimming with the other kids, curled up on the picnic

bench and napped. "The kids gain so much from it," Sunshine said. "They are able to talk about their anger, their frustration, their sadness from not having any parents around for long periods, or having parents return who don't act and speak like they did before."

She first experienced Camp C.O.P.E. during a presentation at a son's San Antonio middle school. Then came the move to Louisiana and her divorce. When Jeanne heard there was a weekend version of Camp C.O.P.E. at Mo-Ranch, she was interested, but doubted she and her kids could participate.

"Living in Louisiana, eight hours away, I thought there was no way I could afford to bring the family. But Camp C.O.P.E. sent me pre-paid gas

See Camp, page 11A

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## Parks gearing up for summer activities

The Kerrville Parks and Recreation Department has prepared a full schedule of activities for the spring and approaching summer months. For those who wish to learn the what, where and when of these activities, get your free copy of the Summer Activity Guide for 2012. Call park headquarters at 257-7300 during business hours to learn where the full color brochure may be obtained.

The Summer Activity Guide contains 15 pages of various activities for all ages and interests. Helpful when planning outings, this guide has a directory of all parks in the system and what features are available at



John David Lipscomb At the park

each park location. For example, information on the facilities at Kerrville-Schreiner Park include how to make reservations, what amenities are available and a schedule of fees that may apply.

Special events can be found in the guide, including a program known as Movies in the Park, three free movies for family members of all ages. And no doubt the most popular summer event is Kerrville's 4th on the River, an annual event featuring entertainment (to be announced soon) and the best fireworks show in the Hill County.

What is summer without water? The Summer Activity Guide lists many water related activities. Starting with the free sprayground at Carver Park that opened in April and operates daily from 10 a.m. to 7 p.m. except Tuesdays when it is closed for maintenance. The Olympic Pool at Singing Wind Park is the site for both adult lap swimming and a low

impact senior water aerobic exercise group. Both take place on designated days during the months of June and July. Admission to the pool requires a small fee and season passes are available.

Swim lessons are offered and divided into seven groups:

- Tadpoles for ages 6 months to 2 years
  - Seahorses for the 3 and 4 year olds
  - Guppies for ages 5 and older with an introduction to water skills
  - Goldfish for ages 6 and older providing fundamental aquatics skills
  - Dolphins for ages 6 and older stressing stroke development
  - Sharks for ages 6 and older with stroke improving
  - Swordfish for ages 6 and older to refine performance of all strokes
- By request, private swim lessons

will be available this year, with one-on-one instruction after an evaluation. Check the Summer Activity Guide for complete information

The guide also contains new programs. Parks and recreation has teamed with the YMCA at Tom Daniels Elementary School for Summer Day Camps. These camps can be enrolled in by the week or for the entire summer. In addition, a summer youth track program will teach basic track techniques and ends the season with the Texas Amateur Athletic Federation Region 3 Track Meet.

Information including costs related to programs mentioned above as well as many others can be found in the guide.

John David Lipscomb is a member of the Parks and Recreation advisory board for the city of Kerrville and can be reached at 895-4232.



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