

24th Annual Peace Camp Crossed Many Borders

by Paulette Lee

Forty youngsters ages 6-to-12 from nine communities in Adams County and Maryland enjoyed a fun-filled and informative Peace Camp at the Gettysburg Middle School, June 18-22. The theme for the 24th annual event, co-sponsored this year by the Interfaith Center for Peace and Justice (ICPJ) and Project Gettysburg-León (PGL), was “Peacemaking Across Borders”, with borders broadly defined to show how lines drawn between people -- for a variety of reasons -- could cause conflict.

The activities, programmed by myself and fellow volunteers Lea Czar and Peter Boving, addressed borders between cultures, religions, race, age, and abilities, with campers participating in either in same-age groups, or mixed-age groups, overseen by 18 teen counselors.

Creative communication activities featured children’s theater actress and director Ann Griffith, who enthralled campers with her dynamic telling of children’s tales from Russian, middle European and Native American traditions; Gettysburg Middle School student Mary Heaton who led peer mediation exercises; which the campers then re-told and acted out; while I introduced campers to fun and thought-provoking exercises, based on improvisational theater techniques.

Campers participated in “Ability Challenges” led by Peter Boving. Challenges included a 3-legged race and an obstacle course, which navigated first in wheelchairs and then blindfolded.

Crossing borders and peacemaking through arts and crafts had campers trekking to and from the Middle School to the Gettysburg Senior Center, where Adams County Office for Aging community services coordinator Linda Thompson had arranged for seniors from Gettysburg and Biglerville to work with the youngsters in making button bracelets for youths at Taller Xuchialt, the traditional Nicaraguan arts center supported by PGL in León. Jennifer Cole, Associate Dean of Academic Advising at Gettysburg College, enthusiastically led campers and counselors in identifying peace symbols, folding paper (origami) Japanese peace cranes, and sharing and creating peace-oriented poetry.

“South of the Border” featured PGL volunteers Dave and Pat Crowner and Joyce Ettinger, who introduced campers to Nicaragua, León and PGL through a stimulating amalgam of activities that included maps, arts and crafts and video. Three Gettysburg High School students -- Cecilia, Lucia and Sandra Diaz -- introduced campers to their families’ Mexican heritage through traditional paper flower- making, “loteria” (Mexican bingo) and a scrumptious “tres leches” (three milks) cake.

Crossing cultures interactively took counselors and campers to Iraq and its ancient wealth of inventions; to learn “What is a Muslim?” with this year’s ICPJ “Peacemaker of the Year” co-awardee Rukhsana Rahman; and to Ghana in West Africa, with Lutheran Theological Seminary student Godfred Effisah.

Gettysburg’s rich black history was presented by local historian Deborah McCauslin, who introduced campers to some of the more notable “residents” of Lincoln Cemetery, followed by an age-appropriate discussion of slavery and the acting out of free black woman and kidnap victim Kitty Payne.

On our last day, we watched “Beauty and the Beast” at the Unitarian Universalists of Gettysburg church and talked about ways this film illustrates crossing borders with Marcus Mincey who portrayed the “Beast” in a Gettysburg High School production of the musical.

Afterwards, campers, counselors and families celebrated *without* borders at Gettysburg Rec Park with an international potluck feast that included cheese arepas donated by the Ugly Mug café, and fun-filled traditional American music, songs and dances from the amazing Tom Jolin.

We hope the campers had a good time and meaningful experiences -- and a big, heartfelt THANK YOU to everyone who made Peace Camp 2012 possible.

Paulette Lee was the volunteer program coordinator for Peace Camp 2012. She is a member of both Project Gettysburg-León and Interfaith Center for Peace and Justice. Paulette is a world traveler who has

conducted peacebuilding training programs internationally. For more information about ICPJ, visit www.icpj-gettysburg.org. To learn more about PGL, visit www.gettysburg-leon.org.