

Dear Camper, Staff, Parent...and grandparents!

When Dad Kunz started Deerfoot Lodge in 1930, his desire was to build godly young men and from the beginning, this challenge has been taken seriously. On June 29, 1936 DL was incorporated by the University of the State of New York, Education Department. The original purpose continues: building godly young men in a Christ-centered community through wilderness camping. Learning to swim is still learning to swim. We still teach campers to paddle a canoe, to fish, to build a fire, to use an ax, a pocket knife, a compass, to observe wildlife, to shoot with bow and arrow, to aim a .22 rifle, to make a belt – not many changes. Campers still go out on over-night hikes and canoe trips and these become, by design, more challenging as the campers get older. There are still baseball, basketball, tether ball, and soccer games, and there are all-camp games like Capture the Flag and Naval Battle. The singing, After Breakfast Bible Studies and Breaking of Bread service continue as Dad Kunz began them over 80 years ago.

The impact of this DL program is more important than the learned skills. There can be an increased understanding of who Jesus Christ is, what He has accomplished for us, and how He would like us to live our lives. Often there is increased willingness to accept responsibility for our own decisions, to try new experiences, to accept and achieve new challenges and high standards - from promptness, to cabin clean-up, to the awards program, to overcoming and adapting to challenges on the trail. As a result of the DL experience, campers often develop a new respect for themselves and for others, an increased self-confidence and a healthy independence. Campers learn to work together, to laugh together, and to develop their leadership skills. Life-long relationships often begin at DL.

Whereas the core of the DL program has not changed very much, considerable time, energy and money have been invested to keep campers and staff safer. For example, rocks have been removed from the ball field, campers are no longer transported in the back of an open truck, and they are now restricted in their water activities until they have passed their swim test. Staff are more thoroughly screened and come for three weeks of staff training, which includes certifications in Life Guarding, CPR, and Wilderness First Aid, as well as training in program and counselor roles. The Rifle Range now includes a certified NRA staff instructor. DL is accredited by the American Camping Association and is inspected annually by the New York State Health Department, which issues our operating permit.

Today it is possible for DL campers and parents to know much more about DL through printed material, the web site, presentations in ten or more locations around the country, and the ability to communicate directly with the Director of Deerfoot Lodge through letter, e-mail, or the telephone.

Even with all of our efforts to make DL as safe as practical, risks remain. Accidents continue to happen. Bumps, bruises, cuts, sprains, breaks, etc. happen each year, just as they do at home. Our program and environment presents potential for serious accidents. Over 40 years ago a Deerfoot camper died from a fall and there is the potential, despite all of our efforts to ensure a safe environment that a camper could drown. Yes, at Deerfoot, we are conscious that our setting and program include real risks despite our best efforts.

Our state Health Department continues to write regulations designed to eliminate risk at camps. Some of these regulations seem to work against the DL philosophy and program. DL now is required to chlorinate its water even though we have never failed a pure water test. Campers are no longer permitted to cliff jump from any height. Moreover, it is becoming increasingly difficult for campers and staff to swim on their out-of-camp trips even with an American Red Cross certified life guard present– even on canoe trips. Again, this is due to regulations from the Health Dept.

We know that risk can never be eliminated from life, nor should it be. While Deerfoot works hard to manage its risks, we also embrace them because we know that they provide important growth opportunities. Hiking into the deep wilderness, far from emergency care, incurs significant risk. However, the experience of such a trip provides growth experiences that can't be known otherwise. Learning to identify and adapt to hazards in the wilderness, experiencing pristine parts of God's creation not easily reached, the challenge of carrying a pack over distance on rugged trails, and living together in a primitive campsite community provide opportunities for the kinds of character and spiritual growth needed in godly young men. So, while we are aware of the risks, we accept them and hike on because we value the growth.

There are fewer and fewer wilderness camps like Deerfoot. Some of this is due to a reluctance to accept risk in light of a societal trend that brings frequent lawsuits. Deerfoot has never been sued, but a major suit would have the potential of closing down Deerfoot Lodge. That is why we write this letter, which has two purposes:

1. To express the reality of risks at Deerfoot.
2. To ask parents who send their sons to Deerfoot to assume these risks with us.

Whereas DL has not changed very much, our society has. To help ensure that the DL experience will be available for your children and your grandchildren it has been recommended that the enclosed Assumption of Risk Form be signed and returned before your camper can register at Deerfoot Lodge.

The Deerfoot Lodge Board of Directors and Staff look forward to keeping DL a great experience that seeks to build godly young men in a Christ-centered community through wilderness camping. At DL your camper can find a relatively unchanged world – as the campers often request on their evaluations: "keep DL as it is. Don't change anything!"

I look forward to seeing your son at camp this summer!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Chief Ron". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Chief Ron

### Risk Disclosure

The nature of wilderness activity and the Deerfoot program involve risks. Our program and trips require living in tents or open cabins/lean-tos, washing in the lake (no showers), physical challenges, wild animals, uneven terrain, severe weather, falling trees, and traveling in vehicles (15 passenger vans, or other) driven by counselors on both highways and dirt roads. Overnight Backpacking and canoe trips into the wilderness may involve swimming at sites not inspected by New York State, remote access to emergency medical facilities (up to 24 hours), and food preparation by counselors and campers. Eligible dietary restrictions are accommodated by staff members who are not food service professionals. Backcountry destinations are far from medical care centers (24+hours) and often include hazardous terrain, including cliffs, caves, steep trails, and waterfalls. Inherent in these activities and conditions are risks to life and safety for both campers and staff. Thus, it is important for staff and campers (and their families) to understand and assume these risks together. We accept them because valuable growth comes from learning how to identify hazards and adapt behavior, not only at Deerfoot, but also for a lifetime of enjoying the outdoors.

The recognition and management of risks and hazards in wilderness settings is taught and practiced at Deerfoot. Three weeks of staff training includes certification in Wilderness First Aid, Life Guard, and CPR, emergency procedures, driver training, as well as skills for leading wilderness activities. Deerfoot has a registered nurse who lives at camp above a six bed infirmary. A doctor's physical exam within two years is required before coming to Deerfoot. The New York State Department of Health inspects the camp each summer. All waterfront activities are supervised by a certified Lifeguard or Water Safety Instructor.

Even Deerfoot's best efforts cannot guarantee safety or eliminate real risks to life and limb. If after reading through Deerfoot's publications (web site, brochure, registration materials, etc.) you have any questions about Deerfoot's environment, programs, activities and/or personnel please don't hesitate to call the Camp Director to discuss these. He can be reached at (518)256-0106. It is important that parents and campers assume these risks with us as we together participate in the Deerfoot program. Importantly, pray for the safety of campers and staff this summer. Please read and sign the following assumption of risk statement.

### Assumption of Risk

I have been informed and am aware – and give permission – for my son to participate in Deerfoot supervised activities, including swimming, at sites that are not inspected by the NYS permit-issuing official. With the permit-issuing official's knowledge, Deerfoot Lodge staff will determine the suitability of the swimming site. I understand that locations of canoe trips, swimming, and hiking may be remote or inaccessible and thus prevent prompt transfer to an emergency medical health care facility. I have carefully read and understand the program, policies and risks as presented in the Deerfoot Lodge publications. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and I have discussed these with my son, and we accept the inherent and program risks involved.

### Release of Image & Address

I give permission for Deerfoot Lodge to use my son's picture for advertising display, print publication, web site, audiovisual presentations or otherwise. I give permission for our mail address to be shared with other campers for the purpose of correspondence with friends made at camp or for regional initiatives, such as carpooling.

Parent/Guardian signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Camper Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_