

A Spell in the Mountains Gives Migrant Workers' Kids a Chance to Dream

LATIMES 9/1

Times Summer Camp Fund

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As the summer winds down for 100 children of migrant farm workers in the Ventura County area, they are left with fond memories of their week in the mountains of Santa Barbara. For most, it was their first time at summer camp—and being away from their parents.

Many of the children almost didn't make it to camp because their parents, unfamiliar with the concept of summer camp, initially were reluctant to let them go. So camp organizers arranged for a bus to take the parents for a day at the camp.

"The parents came up, and my wife and I had a big barbecue and

gave them a tour and explained the idea of camp. It was something totally new to them, not something they'd ever been exposed to before," said Rick Garcia, camp director at the Society of St. Vincent de Paul Circle V Ranch Camp.

"The kids are really nice, and their parents are pretty new to American culture. It was really a pleasure to expose them to something positive and new," said Garcia. "You'd never know that they come from tough situations. Once they get to camp, they are all good kids."

Upon their return, the children—all grade- to middle-school students from the Rio School District—wrote essays about their experiences. Here are some excerpts:

Judy, 9: "After having had the opportunity to attend Camp V Ranch during the summer it has given me

a chance to think about going away to a four-year university. I can now start planning my future because I am no longer afraid of leaving home and being away from my family. After graduating from the university I would want to be a veterinarian because I was taught at home and reinforced at camp to love others and treat them with respect. Therefore I would like to pursue a career as a vet and take care of animals. I feel confident that I will do well in school and have a great future. I met other students who attend the Rio School District. I met new kids at camp and made them my friends. I hope to see them in the future. I hope other students can go to camp next year."

Gabriela, 11: "When we were at the roundup, everyone was sitting down outside and we were talking about what Circle V Ranch means.

Then we said that Circle V means that circle is to love God and V mean means to love others. Also I learned that we can do all kinds of things. We learned to do necklaces, rings and bracelets. I really learned about things."

Nancy, 8, originally wrote her essay in Spanish. Here is a translation of part of it: "At Circle V Ranch I learned about what it means to love God and to love others. Also when we got together for the Roundup I learned what it means to get together with all the children. I also loved playing sports, swimming and taking hikes along nature trails. . . . I want to go back to summer camp to see my counselors. I'd love to talk with my counselor to talk about what I could do to go to college after I graduate from high school. After I finish school, I'd like to be a teacher to help children."

Every year since 1954, readers and employees of The Times have sent thousands of needy children to summer camp. This year more than 11,000 children will experience a special summer thanks to the \$1.6 million raised last year.

The average cost of sending a child to camp for a week is \$150. This year the McCormick Tribune Foundation will match the first \$1.2 million in contributions at 50 cents on the dollar.

Checks should be sent to: L.A. Times Summer Camp Campaign, File No. 56984, Los Angeles, CA 90074-6984. For more information, call (213) 237-5771. To make credit card donations, visit www.latimes.com/summercamp. Do not send cash.

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