

50 Years of God's Blessings

A historical account of Center Lake Bible Camp

Tustin, Michigan

1956 - 2006

Introduction

Historical documents indicate that an association of Baptist churches met 70 years ago for a conference on June 4-7, 1936, at Ludington. (That's right. Annual Meetings lasted four days back then, Thursday evening through Sunday evening). What they had in common was their Swedish heritage and language. The association was known as the *Swedish Baptist Conference of Lower Michigan*. The eight affiliated churches included Manistee, the oldest begun in 1892, Ludington, Cadillac, Tustin, Lakeside, Dalton, Algoma, Elim (Detroit) and Elim (Grand Rapids) which later disbanded. At the meeting in 1936, two organizations were formed: *The Lower Michigan Swedish Baptist Women's Federation* and *The Lower Michigan Swedish Baptist Young People's Fellowship*.

A few years later *The Lower Michigan Swedish Baptist Men's Brotherhood* was also organized. All three auxiliary organizations had a profound impact upon the District's earliest camping ministries and eventually upon the founding of the Center Lake Bible Camp. In 1938, the word "Swedish" was dropped from the name and it was officially called *The Lower Michigan Baptist General Conference*. At that time, the association had no director, no office, no employees and no property. Leadership was given by pastors and lay people.

For the purposes of this historical account, it should be noted that the Lower Michigan Baptist General Conference later went through another name change to *The Michigan Baptist General Conference* hereafter referred to simply as the **MBGC** which is a District that is affiliated with the national denomination, *The Baptist General Conference* hereafter referred to as the **BGC**. The Men's, Women's and Youth organizations also went through name changes and are hereafter referred to as the **Men's Brotherhood**, **Women's Ministries** and **CYF** (Conference Youth Fellowship). Center Lake Bible Camp is hereafter referred to as **CLBC**. The District leadership had a number of different boards, committees, officers, names and roles. Ultimately, the final leadership decisions were vested in the District's Trustee Board and/or Board of Ministries hereafter simply referred to as the **Board**.

Early Camping Ministries

Records indicate that in 1941 the first camping ministry began with a one-week youth camp for ages 13 and older. The location of those youth camps in the earlier years is not identified. Later in that summer of 1941, the first adult camp was held for one week in August at Reed City, Michigan, but that location also is not identified. It was called "Summer Assembly." The next year it was moved to Camp Manikiwa, a rental facility, on Lake Eleanor at Brethren, Michigan, which was located about 15 miles northeast of Manistee or 35 miles west/northwest of Cadillac. For a few years it rotated between the two locations. By 1945 the youth camps were also held at Camp Manikiwa. The first annual Junior Camp (ages 10-12) was held in 1946 at Manikiwa. The cost was \$8.00 for the week plus 50 cents for insurance.

By 1949, the camping program expanded to a week each for Junior Boys, Junior Girls, Intermediates and the Young People. From 1951 through 1955, those camps were held at rental facilities at the Rainbow Lake Bible Camp near Trufant, Michigan, which was approximately 35 miles northeast of Grand Rapids. The cost for the three age groups was \$9.00 a week. A Young Adult's Retreat for the Labor Day weekend was added to the program as well as a Men's Brotherhood Retreat.

During those 14 camping years at the rental facilities, one pastor was named as the camp manager for the summer and another pastor as the camp director for each week. The director was responsible to enlist the necessary staff such as chapel speakers, Bible teachers and counselors. All churches were requested and expected to allow their pastors to serve a week at camp each summer. Frequently professors from Bethel College & Seminary in St. Paul, Minnesota, personnel from the BGC headquarters in Chicago and BGC world missionaries were brought in to be the guest speakers.

New Leadership - New Vision

Discussions about the District having its own camping facilities began as early as 1946 during the Annual Meeting at the Elim Baptist Church in Detroit. The delegates instructed Pastor Ivar Anderson (the State Missionary) ***"to look for a camp site of our own for our summer camp work."*** There is no record of any progress report on that mandate for a number of years. The CYF and the Men's Brotherhood were strong motivating forces in the District and frequently pressed forward the issue of the District having its own camp site. Several possible sites were located including one on a small lake called Center Lake which was 3-4 miles east of Tustin, Michigan.

In the spring of 1954, Rev. Walter (Wally) Peterson came from the pastorate of the Elim Baptist Church in Isanti, Minnesota, to Grand Rapids, Michigan, to serve as the State Missionary. He also came with a heart of compassion for a camping ministry within the Michigan District.

By the time of the Annual Meeting in May, 1954, at the Washington Avenue Baptist Church in Ludington, the Board had appointed some of its own members to a Site Selection Committee with Pastor Gordon Anderson of the Lakeside Baptist Church in Muskegon as chairman. The delegates voted *“that the Board continue studying the matter of securing a camp site for the Lower Michigan Conference.”*

During the summer of 1954, the Board began to seriously consider the property available at Center Lake in six adjoining parcels for a total of 40 acres at the price of \$5,000. On August 26, 1954, the Board voted to purchase the property if the churches could raise the necessary funds. Each church was then sent a letter for the purpose of gaining their confirmation or dissent. Replies were to be in by September 30, 1954. A special camp fund was established. The CYF made the first contribution of \$338.

Wally Peterson was the speaker for the Intermediate Camp at Rainbow Lake in August 1954. At that time there was a District newsletter entitled **The Michigan Baptist Messenger**. In the September, 1954, issue of that newsletter, Wally indicated that he had received a letter dated August 23, 1954, from one of the campers whom he did not identify. The letter read as follows: *“Dear Wally: I got home all right, but my parents aren’t home. I just wanted to let you know how thankful I am for the messages that you brought while I was at camp. I am thankful that every message you brought touched my heart. I am glad that I was saved at camp too. I do not come from a Christian home, but I think I can manage to tell my mother and my father the Word of God too. God bless you.”* Wally commented: “The letter indicates the basic reason why we believe so strongly in the value of our Bible camps. Statistical reports may indicate how many decisions were made, but one letter like this demonstrates how real those decisions are.”

During a Men’s Retreat at Rainbow Lake on September 10-12, 1954, a group of men in two cars left the retreat on Saturday morning and drove up to Center Lake to view the prospective site. It is not known how many men there were or who all was included, but we do know that Wally Peterson, Norm Sjogren (Algoma), Sven Nelson (Algoma) and Pastor Lloyd Mattson (Wayside Chapel, now Mona Shores Baptist) were among those who went. Looking back, it was a journey of divine providence.

The men who made the trip walked over the entire grounds. Before they left, they all knelt down (apparently on what is now known as “flag pole hill”) and they fervently prayed asking God to make it possible for the District to have that property as a camp site if it was His will. Those who spied out the Promised Land, went back to the retreat and reported their findings to the entire Men’s Brotherhood. The next day (Sunday) the Men’s Brotherhood went on record as being in favor of buying the property and voted to designate \$100 toward its purchase. Pastor Lloyd Mattson and Sven Nelson remember it well and confirm the above account.

The minutes indicate that on December 3, 1954, the Board authorized the Site Selection Committee to borrow \$3,000 (another report says \$5,000) from the Luther State Bank in Tustin for a period of six months. It actually borrowed \$3,500 from the bank and \$1,000 from an individual. Each church was then contacted and asked to appoint one or more persons to ask individuals to be donors of “Camp Shares.” The goal was to solicit 500 donors with each giving \$10 toward the camp fund. The plan was successful because the bank loan was repaid in full in three months on March 1, 1955, and the personal loan was repaid shortly thereafter.

Vision Fulfilled - Mission Begins

The minutes indicate that at the Annual Meeting held May 12-15, 1955, at the Temple Hill Baptist Church in Cadillac, Pastor Gordon Anderson gave a report to the delegates *“that the camp grounds are all ours and paid for.”*

On Saturday, May 14, 1955, all the Annual Meeting Conference attendees drove from Cadillac down to the new camp site at Center Lake where a dedication service was held under the leadership of Pastor Herb McDonald of the Washington Avenue Baptist Church in Ludington. A check for \$5,000 was presented to the Camp Development Committee to start the development process. The surviving members of the Camp Site Selection Committee recall the dedication, but only one, Pastor Lloyd Mattson recalls the gift. However, he does not know who the donor was and that party remains anonymous to this day. Dave Boes, the current MBGC Treasurer, calculated that the comparable worth of that gift today, fifty years later, would be \$35, 971 which is about an average increase of 4% annually.

Early Development of the Camp

Following the purchase of the camp, apparently most, if not all, of the members of the Camp Site Selection Committee then became members of the Camp Development Committee. Construction began on various development projects in the late spring of 1955. Pastor Herb McDonald, Ludington, remembers that he turned over the first shovel of dirt on the new site for the first building erected - an outhouse! Pastor Irvin Piell and Norman Sjogren, both of the Algoma Baptist Church, cut down the first tree while Pastor Lloyd Mattson stood by and watched it fall. One of the major tasks in preparing for the development of the camp was the laborious task of cutting down and removing the trees, grubbing out of the stumps and clearing the land making it suitable for the construction of buildings. Mr. Don Sievert (Manistee) aided that process considerably by bringing in a bulldozer

Then came more unexpected work. The July, 1956, issue of the District newsletter, **The Michigan Baptist Messenger**, reports, *“A recent heavy wind storm felled a great number of trees throughout our camp property, but we are fortunate and thankful that no extensive damage was done to the buildings.”*

The first main building constructed was a combination dining hall and recreation room with an attached kitchen wing. One of the features of this new building was a very large fireplace which served both the lower and upper levels and which was built by Ray Helsel of Algoma. The recreation area was temporarily used as a chapel/worship center. Office space was also located in the new building.

The December, 1955, issue of **The Michigan Baptist Messenger** contains the following report: *“Another matter of rejoicing in our camp program was the possibility of securing all the equipment of the Bethany Beach Hotel & Restaurant, Sawyer, Michigan. All of this equipment was purchased for the sum of \$500 which was donated for this purpose by one of the men on the Building Committee. Two large truckloads plus a loaded pickup have already gone to camp. Some other materials are yet to be transported. Altogether, new equipment to equal what we have, would have cost many thousands of dollars.”*

Work was begun on eight cabins each one built by a church or churches. We have not been able to identify all the churches or which cabins they built but we do know the following: Lakeside (Muskegon) built Fox cabin and Temple Hill (Cadillac) built Beaver. Sven Nelson (Algoma) remembers that Algoma built one but he does not remember the name which is also true of Ludington. Dalton and Sawyer teamed up to

build one together. We do not know who built the remaining three cabins.

Sven Nelson remembers that the Camp Development Committee determined that all eight of the cabins would be identical according to one plan. The Committee chose the cabin building sites, poured the concrete slabs and ordered all the lumber. Each church was then billed for the lumber, but Sven does not remember the cost. Ned Nordine (Ludington) remembers as a boy that Oscar Nelson of Ludington constructed the walls for its cabin in Ludington and then transported them to camp ready to be set in place.

Sven Nelson says that early construction was all done by hand tools as there was no electricity on the property until later. When electricity was brought on the property, the camp could not afford power line polls. There hardly were funds available even to buy the electrical wiring. Very little electrical wire was wasted meaning multiple splices were made. Those wires were fastened to insulators which were then fastened to trees. The trees swayed in the wind and the lines would break resulting in frequent power outages!

Other early building projects were the washroom building containing the toilet and shower facilities, an office/dispensary, a staff housing building, a maintenance shop, a canteen, a pump house, waterfront development and athletic fields. Sven Nelson recalls that the current RV (Recreational Vehicle) site, was a rounded knoll which was entirely leveled by a bulldozer. Osceola County agreed to build the road into camp grounds and still maintains it to this day.

The December, 1955, issue of **The Michigan Baptist Messenger** also carried the following report from the Men's Brotherhood: *“The 2nd annual men's retreat of the Lower Michigan Conference took place on Saturday, October 1, 1955 at the new Bible camp site at Center Lake. Many of the men arrived on Friday evening and slept overnight in the partially open building although the temperature went below freezing. This year there was no recreation schedule planned as all hands were needed for the many and varied tasks in and about the camp. A goodly array of equipment was in evidence including a bull-dozer, a tractor with a scoop, a tractor with a buzz saw, two trucks, and a chain saw. An amazing amount of work was done and the main building nearly completed.”*

Development Progress Report

One year later, on May 18-20, 1956, at the Annual Meeting in Sawyer Highlands Baptist Church, Sawyer, Michigan, the delegates received a report from the Camp Development Committee submitted by Arnold Buckley (Elim) as Chairman. The report read as follows:

- A. Eight (8) cabins to be completed by camp time.
- B. Churches responsible for cabins.
- C. Women's Federation responsible for the standardizing of curtains.
- D. Work delegation:
 - 1. Waterfront - Harold Westerlund (Lakeside), Pastor Vern Wessman (Cadillac), Lester Larson (Lakeside).
 - 2. Playground - Don Sievert (Manistee), Pastor Virgil Swanson (Manistee), Vern Ohs (Lakeside), Pastor Darrell Bellville (Tustin).
 - 3. Toilet & Shower - Pastor Vern Wessman, Arnold Buckley and Pastor Darrell Belleville.
 - 4. Kitchen - Harold Westerlund, Lester Larson and Arnold Buckley.
 - 5. Caulking and painting windows - Pastor Ed Nelson, Sawyer.
 - 6. Floor in auditorium - Pastor Gordon Anderson (Lakeside), Norman Sjogren (Algoma) and Oscar Nelson (Ludington).
 - 7. Wiring - Pastor Joel Anderson (Dalton), Lester Larson, Harold Westerlund, Lewis Votaw (Mona Shores) and Les Hartley (Lakeside)
 - 8. Pump house - Norman Sjogren and John Oslund (Lakeside)

Others known to have served on the Site and Development Committees, but whose names are not listed above include: State Missionary, Wally Peterson, Pastor Lloyd Mattson, Pastor Irvin Piell and Sven Nelson (Algoma), Earl Larson and Earl Barton (Lakeside), Pastor Bert Orman and Bert Carlson (Chandler Park) and Pastor Severin Bernas (Elim, Detroit). Walt Nelson (Bethel) was not directly involved at the time of the inception of the camp. However, because he was a licensed electrician, he became very much involved when electricity arrived on the grounds. Walt still "pulls the electrical permits" for the camp fifty years later.

Many of the men named above are deceased. Those known to still be living at the time of this writing include, Norman Sjogren and Sven Nelson (Rockford, MI), Pastor Lloyd Mattson (Duluth, Minnesota), Pastor Ed Nelson (Denver, Colorado), Pastor Herb McDonald (St. Paul, Minnesota), Pastor Irvin Piell (Grand Rapids, Michigan), Pastor Darrell Belleville (California) and Walt Nelson (Muskegon, MI).

The delegates voted at the 1956 Annual Meeting that the Camp Development Committee be authorized to borrow up to \$15,000 to complete the work in time for the camping season. Again, Dave Boes calculated that a comparable loan today would be \$107,913. The delegates at that 1956 meeting also voted that *“anyone using the camp other than our churches, be charged 25 cents a day.”*

What’s In A Name?

It appears that the name “Center Lake Bible Camp” was the name chosen for the new camp by the Site Selection Committee and ratified by the Board. However, some time prior to the May, 1956, Annual Meeting at Sawyer, the CYF raised the issue about the name chosen for the camp. The report says, *“It is felt by many young people that “Center Lake” is a very common name and does not have much appeal as a name. We would like to have a contest among the CYF members to obtain a name with more attraction. The winning name would be selected by the State Board.”* The Board at its May 18, 1956, meeting voted not to act upon any suggestion for a name change and that the official name for the camp be *“The Center Lake Bible Camp.”* However, it did take action to allow the CYF to have a contest to name the cabins which had only been given numbers when they were built. It also voted: *(1) that swimming be allowed on Sundays at CLBC, (2) that all Pastor’s children be allowed to attend camp without charge, and (3) that any workers donating one full week of service to the camp be given one free week of camping.”* An interesting sideline is that swimming on Sundays was not actually permitted until sometime in the mid-70’s!

Initial Launch Gets Underway

The first camping season was held in August 1956 on a Sunday through Sunday schedule. There was a Jr. Boys Camp (ages 9-12) held July 30 - August 6 for a cost of \$10.50. Pastor Severin Bernas of the Elim Baptist Church in Detroit was the Director for the week. Ted Nelson (Algoma) remembers being at that camp as a 12 year old boy. There were not enough cabins, so the Boy’s Brigade of the Algoma Baptist Church stayed in a large army tent with “Little” Bob Ericksen as the counselor. Because of the large attendance that first summer, three smaller tents and two travel trailers were used to help house the staff. Nellie Barr Friske (Algoma) remembers working in the kitchen that summer with the kitchen staff staying in tents.

On August 6-13, 1956, there was a Jr. Girls Camp (ages 9-12) held, for the cost of \$10.50 with Pastor Virgil Swanson, Manistee, Director. On August 13-20, there was

an Intermediate Camp (ages 13-14) for the cost of \$11.00 with Pastor Irvin Piell, Algoma, Director. On August 20-27, there was a Senior Camp (ages 15 and up) for the cost of \$12.00 with Pastor Rueben Dahl, Ludington, Director. The Business Manager for the summer was Pastor Darrel Bellville of Tustin.

Total attendance was 444 campers which was the largest attendance ever and a 28% increase over the previous year at Rainbow Lake. The reports says that there were 41 campers who made decisions for salvation and 122 for the rededication of their lives to Christ. There is no record that anyone who served at CLBC that year was salaried.

Affiliated Churches in 1956

When Center Lake Bible Camp began its ministry 50 years ago, the following 22 churches were affiliated with the Lower Michigan Baptist Conference:

- First Baptist Church, Manistee
- Temple Hill Baptist Church, Cadillac
- First Baptist Church, Tustin
- Washington Avenue Baptist Church (now Cornerstone Baptist), Ludington
- Lakeside Baptist Church, Muskegon
- Dalton Baptist Church, Muskegon
- Wayside Chapel (now Mona Shores Baptist Church) Muskegon
- Sheridan Drive Baptist Church, Muskegon
- Bethel Baptist Church, Muskegon
- Calvary Baptist Church, Grand Haven
- Algoma Baptist Church, Rockford
- Sawyer Highlands Baptist Church, Sawyer
- Elim Baptist Church, Detroit
- Grace Baptist Church, Detroit (now Faith Bible, Livonia)
- Faith Baptist Church, Berkley (later Royal Oak)
- Oscoda Baptist Church, Oscoda
- Calvary Baptist Church, Webberville
- Chandler Park Drive Baptist Church, Detroit (later disaffiliated)
- Frederic Baptist Church (later disaffiliated)
- Prudenville Baptist Church (later disaffiliated)
- Immanuel Baptist Church, Roscommon (later disaffiliated)
- Calvary Baptist Church, Mikado (later disaffiliated)

Camp's Continual Growth

Other buildings were added as needed and finances were available. Between 1960, and 1965, three staff cabins were built. The chapel was built in 1964, according to a design first suggested by the CYF that it be in the shape of a cross. The location of the new chapel became an issue because a canteen already stood on that preferable site. Eventually the Board voted that the canteen be relocated and the new chapel be built on that location.

The dedication service for the new chapel was held on July 4, 1964. Organist was Mrs. Wally (Rose) Peterson. Greetings were read from a number of individuals including The Honorable George Romney, the Governor of the State of Michigan. The Dedicatory Message was given by Rev. Lawrence Swanson, Executive Secretary of Bible School and Youth Board of the Baptist General Conference.

In 1969-70, a duplex cabin and a workshop/garage were built. Winterization of the dining hall, chapel and staff cabins took place in 1972, as year-around camping became popular. The first winter retreat was held later that year by the youth of the Faith Baptist Church of Royal Oak. In 1983, the old dispensary/office building was remodeled and winterized and included two isolation rooms.

Administratively Speaking

Thirteen years after the CLBC site was purchased, it was discovered that the camp actually owned six separate parcels of land totaling 40 acres with six separate deeds. Names of the sellers on the abstracts and deeds include Coy & Elizabeth Hammar, Marion & Martha Fauble, Lee Eugene & Hallie Fauble, Dallas & Mary Walker, Ward Johnson, Richard Helsel, Rene Hammar and Jevene Vaughn. Melvin & Pearl Wood and Charles & Mabel Wood were also involved in the transactions, but the relationship is unclear.

During the fiscal year 1968-69, it was discovered that CLBC had been and was paying taxes on all six of the parcels. Those six deeds were rolled over into one warranty deed. The Board then requested the Sherman Township Board to remove the property from the tax rolls and refund all the taxes that CLBC had paid for the 13 years it had owned the property. The Board agreed in advance that they would amiably abide with whatever decision the Township made concerning their request. The Township removed the property from the tax rolls but did not rebate any of the tax money. There is no record of the dollar amount of the taxes paid.

Camp Property Expansion

During the fiscal year 1969-70, the Board was able to purchase the 80 acre parcel of property (considered a farm) adjoining the camp to the west. For several years, the Board had indicated to the owner its interest in purchasing the property, but he was unwilling to sell. Once more the owner, Mr. William Hoyer of Columbus, Ohio, was contacted and invited to visit CLBC. He finally accepted the invitation and was greatly impressed by the camp's ministry. Shortly thereafter he agreed to sell the 80 acres to the camp for \$9,000. That transaction increased the total camp property to 120 acres. Much of the newly acquired land had been recently planted with pine trees. Immediately a portion of that property was used for Wilderness Camping.

Lightening and Fire

On May 31, 1973, the MBGC Board was in a business meeting at the South Kent Baptist Church in Grand Rapids when the meeting was interrupted by a telephone call from Carm Johnson at camp informing them that the dining hall had burned to the ground following a lighting strike. The Board set aside its regular agenda for a time and committed the matter to the Lord in prayer. After some discussion, it appointed an ad hoc committee and authorized it to take whatever emergency steps were necessary to keep the camp program going for the summer months which was only about six weeks away. God answered prayer.

People from all over the MBGC district came to help in the cleanup including some from the North American Baptist Conference, a sister denomination. Spring Hill Camp loaned a backhoe and dump truck to haul away the debris.

The Lakeside room of the chapel was turned into a kitchen. The camp was able to purchase of an entire kitchen from Anderson's Restaurant that was going out of business near Sawyer, Michigan, at the cost of \$2300 which was less than half of the appraised value. A new septic system was installed as well as a large hot water heater and the necessary plumbing. Heavy duty electrical wiring was installed. A walk-in cooler was placed outdoors behind the chapel. The choir loft and the prayer room were turned into food and dry storage areas.

The chapel served as both a dining hall and as a worship center. School-style tables with attached stools were borrowed from the Caberfae Ski Lodge northwest of

Cadillac. The Hillside room of the chapel served as a classroom and even as a bunk area on occasions. The entire cost of getting the camp ready for the summer was \$8,333.77. It used those facilities from the summer of 1973, (over 1100 campers that summer) until the summer of 1977, when the new dining hall/lodge was completed.

The old dining hall was insured with the Church Mutual Insurance Company and the MBGC received \$24,000 for the building and its contents plus \$5,000 for tree damage. Plans soon got underway for a new dining hall/lodge and a fund raising campaign was begun among the District churches under the leadership of Pastor Reuben Anderson from Portage who was the District's new Missions Director. There were three ways in which everyone in the District was given the opportunity to participate: (1) *The Director's Club* which was a major gift contribution of \$500 or more, (2) *The 300 Band* which stipulated that all individuals who participated would receive a green lapel pin or a pendant in the shape of the State of Michigan with the words "300 CLBC" on it signifying that the person was one of 300 members of Gideon's Army who had made a commitment to give \$300 toward the new dining hall/lodge over a period of three years and (3) *The Share-Havers* for those who could not participate in either of the first two, but wanted to have a share in the fund-raising campaign.

From Out of the Ashes the New Arose

On November 25, 1974, the Board approved the contract of the West Shore Builders of Ludington for \$91,012 to erect and complete the lower level of the new dining hall/lodge building. On June 2, 1975, it authorized West Shore to "rough in" the upper level structure for the cost of \$60,975. After that most of the work was done with volunteer labor with the camp purchasing the necessary materials. Realizing it is risky to name some volunteers and not all of them, it would be remiss to write this history and not recognize the unwavering work and labor of love by architect/builder Tom Knox (Haslett) and a trio of men from Lakeside Baptist Church - namely Jerry Wheeler, Lester Larson and Harold Westerlund. Much of the interior of that dining hall/lodge is their handiwork.

Eventually the total cost for the newly completed building was \$246,268.16. The first use of the new building was the Labor Day Retreat in September, 1976, with 1977, being the first full summer season for the new facility. The debt was finally paid off and the Mortgage Burning ceremony for the dining hall/lodge took place at the Annual Meeting in May 1990, in Sawyer.

Yet Another Fire

In the summer of 1977, during a Junior High camp, another fire struck the property. It is believed to have been started by someone carelessly throwing a cigarette out of a car while driving down 20 mile Road. The fire ignited some grass and before it was able to be extinguished it burned off 2.2 acres of lovely pine trees on land that is now horse pasture to the west of the roadway coming into the camp.

Expanded Ministries - Expanded Improvements

With the increase of campers came the increase in need for personnel such as maintenance people, office help, cooks, lifeguards, Bible teachers, chapel speakers, and counselors. In the early years, many of those who served did so on a volunteer basis. Some of the first salaried staff were summer camp directors. The first salaried summer counselors were hired in 1970. Eventually other paid staff members were added as needed.

The first horsemanship camping program began in 1979, with campers being bused each morning 25 miles west to Camp Living Waters. One group did horsemanship while the other group had a Bible study and then in the next session the two groups flip-flopped positions with the Bible teacher presenting the same lesson twice. This arrangement was cost effective and filled a real program need for three years. In 1990, a small horse tack barn and a riding arena were built to restart the horsemanship program on CLBC's own site. In the beginning, horses were leased for the summer months, but in the early 90's, the camp purchased its own horses. In 1994, a Horse Village called "The White Heart Ranch Camp" was established for the horsemanship program and in 1996 a 50' x 100' horse barn was built.

In 1989, a major improvement was made in the entire septic/sewer system to adequately allow for future expansion and usage. In 1990, the "Adopt-A-Cabin program began whereby churches adopted a cabin and then completely remodeled and winterized it for year-around use. Winterization of other buildings took place as well to accommodate the popularity of camping during all seasons of the year.

A lovely house was built on the grounds in 1981 primarily by donated labor. It was originally occupied by the Lysle & Carm Johnson family. Since 1988 it has been used as the home for the Camp Director's family. In 1988, another house was built on the property which was used for several years by the Director of Maintenance and since then it has been used for the Program Director's family.

An archery and rifle range were added early on in the camping program. A hard-surface, double tennis court was added as well as a number of other recreational facilities. A new 200 foot waterslide was built in 1980 with black plastic runner provided by the Beaverton Baptist Church on the hill by the maintenance area. That same hill was lighted for night time snow tubing in the winter. However, Sunshine Mountain was a bigger sliding hill during daylight hours. In 1991, 110 foot concrete waterslide was built at the waterfront.

In 1997, a complete renovation program of the chapel began starting with the addition of restrooms provided by funds donated by the Sr. Adults or Michigan Gold now known as 2nd Half For Him.

In recent years, major renovations/additions have been made to the dining hall including lovely decks, new entrance, bookstore, restroom and kitchen/pantry storage. Recreation and program additions have been the climbing tower, a BMX bike course and a ropes course.

Memorials As Living Legacies

In 1980, the camp was the recipient of a bequest from the estate of Mr. John Libkie who was a member of the Elim Baptist Church in Detroit. "Uncle John" was very active in the Detroit area Child Evangelism Fellowship ministries. He also served at CLBC as a teacher for Junior camps as he loved ministering to children. When he was at camp, Uncle John explained, "*Never mind if you hear me walking and talking as I take my late evening walk. I'm just talking aloud as I pray for all the campers and staff.*" One day he expressed to his pastor, Pastor Cecil Lindblom, his concern about the distribution of his assets upon his death as he wanted to remember CLBC in his will. His pastor helped him find proper legal counsel and upon his death, CLBC was one of the benefactors in the amount of \$31,000.

The miniature golf course was made possible by the Pastor Cy Foster family in memory of Mrs. Queenie Foster. The fountain and plaque by the bell were placed there in memory of Helene Hammer (Tustin) who served as a cook and baker beginning in 1956. Memorial plaques were also given honoring Louie Gardner (Sheridan Drive) and Harold Finstrom (Temple Hill) for their service and devotion to Center Lake Bible Camp.

The Noah's Ark Play Land was built in 2000, by funds given by Nedine Kolmodin's family and offerings by the Michigan Gold Sr. Adults in memory of Pastor Ken Kolmodin (Lakeside). The dedication ceremony was held on September 28, 2000.

A new medical lodge was built in 1995, made possible by funds given by the late Jack Bennett, of the Temple Hill Baptist Church in Cadillac in loving memory of his wife, Katie. The dedication ceremony was held on June 2, 1995.

Support Ministries

A Sr. Adult retreat began in 1981, with the name of Keenagers. In the summer of 1991, the Board changed the name to **Michigan Gold** which was our District's ministry within the national ministry of **BGC Gold**. Also in 1991, Dave & Jean Mueller were appointed by the Board as the Michigan Gold Coordinators. They in turn enlisted other couples to serve on the Advisory Board. Each year since its inception, the MBGC Gold spent the third week of each May serving as volunteers preparing the camp for the summer camping season. Each year it has held a fall retreat at camp and each year all the offerings received were given to the camp, usually for a designated project. The name of the organization was later changed to **2nd Half For Him**. The Muellers concluded their ministry as the coordinators in the fall of 2005 after serving in that position for 14 years.

For many, if not all of the past 50 years, the Men's Brotherhood and the Women's Ministries have held fall retreats at CLBC and they also have been extremely generous in supporting the camp financially.

CLBC has had an extensive ministry to non-affiliated churches and other organizations through rentals especially after the camp became a year-around camping facility. Some groups have rented entire weeks during the summer after our District's camping season ended. Furthermore, the income from the rentals has allowed CLBC to expand in every facet of its ministries. For a number of years, the North American Baptist (German) Conference churches shared extensively in our camping ministries.

Center Lake Bible Camp celebrated its 40th Anniversary/Reunion on August 31, 1996, with the theme "**Yesterday's Memories - Tomorrow's Dreams.**" Approximately 300 people were in attendance and the offering of \$2,957 was designated towards the chapel renovation.

Statement of Philosophy of Christian Camping at CLBC

“Camping at Center Lake Bible Camp is to stimulate growth in children, youth, adults and senior adults in relation to their spiritual, social, physical, intellectual and emotional needs according to the teachings of the Word of God, as accomplished through involvement in varied camp activities. Two purposes flow from the above philosophy: (1) To program for various camp and retreat activities in accordance with philosophy of camping, and (2) To serve all groups who agree with the philosophy of camping by providing facilities and staff to encourage growth in all areas of life accessible through camping.”

Leadership Personnel

State Missionary, Wally Peterson played a major role in the vision for and the founding of the Center Lake Bible Camp. His job description and title was later changed to Executive Director, a position which eventually became the District Executive Minister (**DEM**). Wally retired in 1984 after holding that elective office for 30 years. He passed away in 1999. His widow, Rose, resides in Sturgis, Michigan.

In the early years (1956-57) when there was summer camping only, pastors and lay people provided the necessary leadership to carry out the camping ministry. Although there is no record of 1958-59, Lloyd Mattson recalls that Joe Burkhart was hired as the summer camp director in 1958 and possibly also in 1959. Joe was a science teacher at the Lincoln Elementary School in Muskegon and a member of the Wayside Chapel where Lloyd Mattson was his pastor. If Pastor Mattson’s memory is correct, then Joe Burkhart was probably the first salaried employee that CLBC ever had.

In 1960, Ron McDonnell, a seminary student from St. Paul, Minnesota, came to be the salaried summer director. He was also the waterfront director. It appears he held the position through 1963. Because there was no one on the grounds year-around, Wally Peterson and/or the Board appointed Pastor Joel Knepper of Tustin to serve as the camp manager being responsible to keep a watchful eye on the property. There is no record on whether or not he was financially remunerated for his services.

Beginning in 1964, a series of men (mostly school teachers) served as Summer Camp Directors. They include Mal Pearson (1964-66), Jay Stevens (1967) CE Director, Larry Moreland (1968), Maurice Shields (1969) (football coach from Bethel College, St. Paul, Minnesota), Bob Carigon (1970-71), Homer LeGree (72-73), Steve Butts (1974-78) , Ron Bergman, CE Director, (1979-80) and Tom McIntosh (1981).

Assistant Summer Program Directors include Jerry Wheeler (1975-78), Dave Kregness (1979), Tom McIntosh 1980-85), Tim Gillette (1981), Bob Hamlet (1983), Lowell Anderson (1984), Tim Erickson (1986), Tim Carigon (1987), Aaron Ziebarth (1988-97) and Beaver Trumble (1998).

Fulltime Camp Directors have been Tim (Becky) Gillette 1982-84; George (Lorraine) Kalb 1985-87, Dave (Jean) Mueller, Interim Director 1987-88; Tom (Connie) Cousineau 1988 - 1997 and Duane (Mary) Whitley 1997 to the present.

Full time Maintenance Directors have been Lyle (Carm) Johnson, Tim (Lynn) Davis and Jeff (Judy) Thorn. Full time Program Directors have been Ken (Cheryl) Clausen and Don (Sue) Cochrane. Each of the spouses held other staff positions as well.

Fulltime office secretaries have included Dorothy Trowbridge, Bev McCaughna (1983-98) and Penny (Kerwin) Wondergem 1999 to the present. There have been many cooks, but some of the earliest ones were Helene Hammar, Don Lamphere, Eugene Slagstad, Madge Schultz, Ginger Manson and Donna Crum.

MBGC Executive Ministers during the past 50 years of the camp's history have been Wally (Rose) Peterson 1954-1984, Andy (Donna) Husmann 1984-1997 and Ron (Jodi) Sheveland 1984 to the present.

A Note Of Sadness And A Note of Joy

On Saturday evening, July 11, 1987, a summer staff member, Arlene Keller of Tustin, lost her life as a passenger in a roll-over car accident off Interstate 131 south of Cadillac. The entire camp and community was traumatized. Andy & Donna Husmann, the District Executive Minister, drove up to camp early Sunday morning to spend the week ministering to the grieving staff members and to assist in the Junior Boys Camp that following week which was held as scheduled. The funeral was conducted on Wednesday afternoon at the First Baptist Church in Tustin and was filled to overflowing capacity. Officiating pastors were Rev. Brad Burrell, Rev. Stanley Wheaton and Rev. Robert Ward. Volunteers from area churches and even another camp came in for the afternoon to run the camp so that the entire CLBC staff could attend the funeral. Most of Arlene's family still lives in the Tustin area and we again extend our hearts out to them. The family gave some of Arlene's memorial funds to the camp designated for camp staff media equipment purchases.

On a more joyous note, among the many countless blessings which God has given at CLBC, there is one of deep gratitude and praise to the Lord for His protection. Although there have been accidents at camp such as cuts, bruises and broken limbs, there has never been an accidental fatality or a drowning on the Center Lake Bible Camp property during the past 50 years. Praise the Lord.

Epilogue

There is no way by which anyone can measure the spiritual impact of what the Lord has done in the lives of people while they were at CLBC these past 50 years. Truly it has been and continues to be “holy ground”. But we must remember that the grounds, buildings and facilities are simply the settings in which the Spirit of God works in the hearts and lives of all who attend there. Only eternity will reveal the final results when the last chapter of CLBC’s history is written, not by any person, but by the Lord to whom belongs the glory forever.