

Family-owned camp, Echo Hill Ranch, gets praise from parents across Texas

By Rachel Gross

“We take a lot of personal pride in the quality of our camp, and we think of it as a community and as a family. We relate to parents as partners, and we think of this as a personal expression of our values as parents. The families that love Echo Hill share our values about the importance of summer camping and helping kids get some time away from the competitive pressures of today’s urban life.”

These are the words of Roger Friedman, co-director and co-owner of Echo Hill Ranch, and something he lives by every day. For more than 50 years, the child-centered, non-competitive camp in Medina, Texas, has given children and parents from Texas and across the country a reason to smile.

Echo Hill offers traditional

camp activities such as: horse-back riding, swimming in running freshwater streams, archery, nature study and fossil hunting, backpacking into the camp’s canyons and hills, pottery on a wheel and creative ceramics taught by local hill country potters, basketball, softball, volleyball, tennis, soccer, astronomy, chess and more. Tutoring for bar and bat mitzvah preparation and to improve math and reading skills are available as well.

Many of the campers are second and third generation. Houston parent Anna Eastman sends her children, Ely, Abby and Daniel, to Echo Hill, and her husband and all of his siblings went there. She said her children are fairly different, but each enjoys camp in their own way.

“This is a chance for my kids

to go and be in a safe place where they can be themselves. I feel like few children get that time to build social relationships,” Eastman said. “School makes so much of a demand on them and we are grateful they get to have that freedom. Echo Hill allows kids to be themselves and is kid-focused rather than activity-focused. My children have become more aware of Jewish connection and [Echo Hill emphasizes] values we focus on at home. They let kids put their own stamp on it and what that means for them.”

The goals of Echo Hill are to teach campers about tikkun olam, kindness, teamwork and self-reliance. These ingredients are what entice youngsters to come back year after year.

Mom Ginny Ring of Flower



Photos: Courtesy of Roger Friedman

Campers create art projects in the crafts corral.

Mound attended Echo Hill and her two children, Kokey and Jeff, are third-generation campers. She refers to it as her second home — a safe place where she made memories and lifelong friends.

Ring said Echo Hill is a place that has a down-to-earth connec-

tion and lets kids grow. Her children have had meaningful experiences there.

“I could not imagine a complete childhood without camp influences so it makes sense to give that

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Simchas

BAR MITZVAH

Drew Barrett Solka

Drew Barrett Solka, son of Andrea and Steven Solka of Coppell, was called to the Torah as a bar mitzvah on the morning of March 20, 2010 at Congregation Shearith Israel, with Rabbi William Gershon officiating.

Drew is a seventh-grade student at Coppell Middle School East. He is the brother of Matthew, 15, and the grandson of Carol and Harry Breitbarth of Dallas and Davie Lou and Jack Solka of Austin.

For his mitzvah project, Drew volunteered at both The Family Gateway shelter and the Austin Street shelter in Dallas. He started volunteering at the Family Gateway shelter four years ago when his older brother Matthew started his own mitzvah project there; they have cooked dinner at the shelter on the first Sunday of each month ever since.

Festivities in Drew's honor included Friday night dinner at Blue Mesa in Addison hosted by Drew's aunts and uncles, Ilene Breitbarth, Liz and Michael Solka and Shelley and Gary Solka; Saturday morning breakfast hosted at the Marriott Quorum Hotel in Addison by his



cousins, Bette, Gary, Andrew and Karen Morchower, Jennifer, Dave, Noah and Rachel Stern, and his great-aunt and great-uncle, Gail and Robert Tobey; Saturday Kid-dush hosted by all four of Drew's grandparents; and a Saturday evening party at Edison's in Dallas hosted by his parents. The hospitality suite was hosted by Holli and Scott Baum and Sharon Sowry.

Out-of-town friends and family came from California, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Pennsylvania and New Jersey plus lots of family from Austin, Houston and the Dallas area.

ENGAGEMENT

Heather Paige Lefkof and Michael Krol

Dr. Gary and Marsha Lefkof of Dallas are pleased to announce the engagement of their daughter, Heather Paige Lefkof, to Michael Krol, son of Nikolay and Irina Krol of Weatherford.

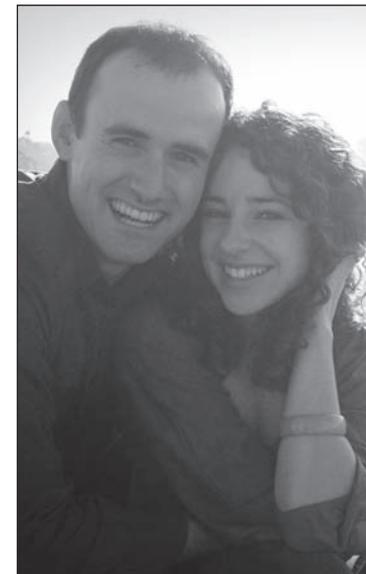
Heather is the granddaughter of Melvin Gordon of Melrose, Mass., and the late Muriel Kaplan Gordon, and Lawrence and Florence Lefkof of Richardson. Michael is the grandson of the late Anatoly Cherches and Sterna Ginsburg, and the late Xaim Krol and Masha Galperina, all of Dzerzhinsk, Belarus.

Both Heather and Michael are graduates of the University of

Texas at Austin. Heather graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree in psychology and Michael with a Bachelor of Science in microbiology.

Heather is currently a milieu therapist on the psychiatric unit at Children's Medical Center in Dallas with plans to attend a psychology graduate program. Michael is a first-year medical student at UT Southwestern Medical School in Dallas.

The couple met on a Birthright Israel trip organized by UT Hillel. Rabbi David Komerofsky, UT Hillel executive director, foresaw their marriage and promised that if they were ever to marry, he would perform the ceremony. His vision will be realized when he



officiates at their June 2010 wedding at the Maple Manor Hotel in Dallas.

NEW CITIZEN

Natalie Joy Davidoff

It is with great happiness that Lauren and Steven Davidoff announce the birth of their daughter, Natalie Joy. Natalie was born at 4:28 p.m. on Sept. 16, 2009, weighing 6 lb. 4 oz. She is the granddaughter of Gaylyn and Howard Lipp and Susan and Michael Davidoff, all of Dallas, and the great-granddaughter of Libby Lipp and Rose Davidoff, both of Houston. Natalie Joy's name honors the loving memory of her great-grandfathers Norton Seidel and Joe Spiritas. Her Hebrew name, Hannah Ayelet, honors the loving memory of her great-grandfather Harold Lipp and great-grandmother Adeline Spiritas.



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benefit to my kids," she said. "I believe the development of who you are happens best in a place where you feel comfortable. My kids have gained an appreciation for natural beauty, and to accept others on the basic standard of 'in order to have a friend, you need to be a friend.' Many Echo Hill alumni have their own memories connected to camp. The magical thing is that my memories, although very different from my children's, are held in the same place."

Erin Kleine sent her now 6-year-old daughter, Clara, to camp for the first time last summer. The Austin mom was a counselor during college, and knew it would be the best camp for her daughter.

She said although Clara was one of the youngest campers, the week she spent there gave her independence, and she is anxiously waiting to go back this summer.

"She went to summer camp before going to kindergarten and she's asked about it every day since," Kleine said. "She has the personality that I knew was going

to be great there and the staff was nurturing to her. She made a lot of friends there. At age 5, she was put in a situation where she had never been. I love that it's non-competitive and their focus is on the children learning about themselves in a safe and comfortable way. That's a rare quality to find."

Bruce and Susie Kaye of Dallas have sent their daughters Cassidy and Liza, 12 and 8, to Echo Hill for several summers. Bruce said they both look forward to camp as soon as the school year starts.

He added that the most beneficial aspects for the girls have been the friends they've made in different cities and learning what it's like to work as a group.

"They've learned that it's important to keep in touch with friends. My children are now friendly with my friends' kids, and it keeps the connection going with parents," Bruce said. "I like that it's a Jewish camp, but not overly religious. I think they get just the right mix. We are spoiled to have a big Jewish community in Dallas. I like that the stress is on camping and having fun, but the religious aspect is popped in. When you look into the ownership of the camp, it's good-quality family that's been running it forever, and that was a push for us."

For more information and to register for summer 2010, visit www.echohillranch.org.

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