

Without electronics, nature is in control at Echo Hill Ranch

By Penny Reukberg

Each year, kids from across Texas flock to Echo Hill Ranch. The small family-run camp nestled in the Texas Hill Country is coming up on its 60th anniversary, which means that among those kids, are second and even third generation campers.

What is it that draws families to Echo Hill Ranch? Dr. Roger Friedman runs the camp with his wife, Roz. Roger, a practicing psychologist and Roz, a clinical social worker, live and work in Maryland when they aren't spending the summer at camp. Friedman was born and raised in Texas and grew up attending Echo Hill when his parents ran the camp. He and Roz began running Echo Hill after his father passed away in 2002. Friedman says, "We are proud to be the first, as well as the only, family-owned camp in Texas that serves the Jewish community while also welcoming families from diverse cultural backgrounds."

Echo Hill parents and campers (both past and present) are quick to express their enthusiasm for the camp. Jordanna Bernstein of Dallas attended Echo Hill as a child and now she and her husband are delighted to send their kids to the camp. Bernstein says, "It is located on the most beautiful property in the Texas Hill Country. I feel that as a camper I developed a true appreciation for the natural environment because of my experiences at Echo Hill, and I want the same for my children. In today's world, where so much of our children's lives are focused on technology, I can't tell you how thrilled I was to learn from my daughter that one of her favorite camp activities was nature study because they got to go on nature hikes!"

The Friedmans are strong proponents of embracing the natural world and de-emphasizing dependence on technology. One of the most important reasons for being "electronics free" is their belief that camp life should create a sense of community. The Friedmans encourage campers to get to know each other and make new friendships. "We feel strongly that electronics and particularly hand-held devices are privatizing experiences," says Roger Friedman. "We also want kids to detoxify from all of the TV and computer use that they are confronted with during the school year." The camp does allow iPods or other MP3 players, since music is so central to most kids' lives, but the devices may only be played at certain times and with speakers at-

Echo Hill granted official Wildlife Preserve status

Echo Hill was recently granted the official Wildlife Preserve status by Bandera and Kerr Counties. The camp intends to continue their emphasis on "leave no trace" policies and living in cooperation with nature. In addition, there will be new bird house building projects, opportunities to maintain deer and turkey feeders and to construct small dams in the water to protect turtles and minnows. Echo Hill's Outdoor Education and Ecology Program Consultant Elliott Stixrud is a graduate of the National Outdoor Leadership School in Wyoming

and is a Certified Wilderness First Responder. He oversees the camp's backpacking and ecology programs and has developed a love for the rustic beauty of the Hill Country as well as a respect for its wilderness ecology. In addition to managing the outdoor education and ecology programs, Stixrud oversees the camp's environmentally sensitive waste management/re-cycling activities. For more information, rates, schedules and contact numbers, visit the Echo Hill Ranch website at <http://echohill.org/>.



Back-pack trips are a favorite activity at Echo Hill



Photos: Courtesy of Echo Hill

A camper enjoys bonding with one of the horses during free swim.

tached so that everyone can listen.

Roz adds, "Parents, particularly those who have attended the camp themselves, send their kids here because it is a timeless experience. The kids wear casual clothes and the setting is very rustic. Our camp parents don't want technology to change the ambience of the camp and neither do we."

Another camp parent, Jodi Cortez sent her son last summer, and this year he is returning with his sister. "Our son, Alex, loved Echo Hill.

We only keep one computer in our house and he had no sense of deprivation without electronics. The true test to me was that all of his clothes came home dirty! He was obviously outside having fun every day!"

Non-competitive in nature, Jewish in orientation and full of electronics-free fun; Echo Hill Ranch will celebrate its 60th anniversary next year. Hundreds of kids from up to three generations are very happy for the opportunity to share in its unique charms.



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