

Jesse's Camps 2024 were a huge success. Around 200 youngsters were registered, and what a week they had!

First, huge thank you to [Donna Dillon](#) and her friends for their gift of fresh fruits, veggies, cheese, and snacks to supplement the meals! And a huge thank you to [Tom Taylor](#) for coming over early to help load it all into Greg's truck. What an incredible village we have! And a huge thank you to all those who participated and created a thrilling, adventure packed, meaningful week. Our thanks especially to Tallahassee Parks, Recreation, and Neighborhood Affairs' Ashley Edwards and the incredible staff at our community centers. Their dedication to our youngsters and to community throughout the year are a testament to the caring nature of our community. Our 5 community center locations are: Walker-Ford, LeVerne Payne, Jack McLean, Jake Gaither and Lawrence Gregory.

Our special guests this year were:

Commissioner Curtis Richardson once again joined us to kick off the week with his voice of wisdom as he shared some of his life story with our kids. Having grown up in an era of segregation when his parents could not vote, his message is to get a good education, be the best you can be, register to vote at 16 and vote at 18. He told our youngsters that they can dream big and perhaps a future President is among us. His demeanor with our youngsters is one of engagement and encouragement. Thank you, Commissioner, for your generosity of time and for inspiring our next generation.

Forester Stan Rosenthal led a nature walk in the woods at Jack McLean. The plan was to learn some basics about tree identification. One youngster was delighted by the adventure and worried about bears. Before we came outside, Stan reviewed some things about trees and their need for water, food and care. Once outdoors, Stan headed for a tree to begin. He pointed out the bark, roots and leaves and talked about which part of the tree is responsible for what task the tree needs for survival. Each step brought something new. He helped the group learn the connection of specific trees named for specific "fruits". Cherries grow on cherry trees, gum balls are from sweet gum trees, pine cones are from pine trees, and pecans grow on pecan trees. By the time we returned indoors, our group could identify them all.

Music Therapist Jane Estrada cast her magical music spell with her group. "Who wants to move?" she asks and invites them to each grab a spot on a wildly colorful parachute and lift it up and then bring it down. While up in the air, those not holding onto the parachute run under it and do some dancing while it's up in the air. In a variation on a drumming circle theme, Jane asked them to name their favorite food and created a rhythm for them to play on their instruments. The skills learned during Jane's sessions were listening carefully for direction, watching Jane's conducting to know if they should play their instruments louder or softer, and being part of a group that is working together to create music.

College Football Hall of Famer (University of Florida), [Carlos Alvarez](#) was welcomed to Walker-Ford with a cheering group of “fans” waving placards with the number 45 (Carlos’ jersey number) colored in. He felt right at home with this group who listened as he shared his life story of leaving Cuba, coming to America and becoming an American football hero, “the Cuban Comet”. Carlos shared his thoughts on turning adversity to opportunity. His message to them was to get an education so you know what opportunities exist, finding something you are passionate about, finding mentors, and trusting community to support and encourage you along the way. When dealing with something that feels overwhelming, he said it’s important to break the overwhelming task into small parts and then celebrate the accomplishment of each small part. During question and answer time, one youngster asked if Carlos is rich. Carlos’ reply said being rich is about being rich in family and friends. Carlos gave each youngster a bracelet with the words: peace, love, community, perseverance written on it to remind them of things that matter in his life and may be important to them, too.

The Tallahassee Youth Orchestra returned with their “petting zoo” this year, and as in previous years, our youngsters were treated to a beautiful classical piece of music and then a rousing piece they all know. They were invited to jump up, dance and sing this song which they did with great delight. Then, each youngster was given time to hold and play the violin, viola, and cello. TYO members, Dr. Allyson Royal, Mr. Lambert Hsieh, and Ms. Angelese Peppers, all play with the Tallahassee Symphony, and they love being able to introduce young people to their stringed instruments. The looks of awe and magic on our youngsters faces tell the story. Dr. Royal brought complimentary tickets for our youngsters and a parent to attend an upcoming TYO performance at Ruby Diamond. We hope many are able to do that to deepen their experience with music.

[Mary Allgire](#) and The Long Forgotten String Band returned for our old time dance. It is a great privilege to have Mary spend time with the staff members from our community centers and give them a refresher in old time dances which they in turn teach to our youngsters during camp week. By the end of the week, our youngsters followed Mary’s calling and added their own unique flair for memorable dances. An example of connections going deeper is that one of the community center staff members has started an old time music group at the Palmer-Monroe Community Center after being introduced to old time music through Jesse’s camps.

Thank you to our Leon County School Board members for once again coming to our various locations and reading books to our youngsters. Thank you Rosanne Wood, Darryl Jones, and Marcus Nicolas for joining us this year. So many of our guests share the message with our youngsters that getting a great education and reading are both crucial in life. We are grateful for the leadership in our community spending time reading with our youngsters.

Field trips this year included a visit to the Riley House to learn about our local African-American and civil rights history, a boat ride at Wakulla Springs, a trip to Marianna Caverns, and a visit to Railroad Square.

Other activities included tie dyeing t-shirts, learning to plant sunflower seeds with our local 4-H group, having s'mores, and so much more.

I am beyond grateful for all who are making time for us this week. For those who have donated to support Jesse's Camps, please know how much good comes from this. Huge thanks to Tallahassee Parks, Recreation and Neighborhood Affairs and their incredible staff! My heartfelt thank you for all we are doing together. Please visit our website for more information

<https://www.talgov.com/parks/JesseCorreiaMemorialScholarship>

with love and a heart filled with gratitude,

Martha Weinstein

Jesse's mom