

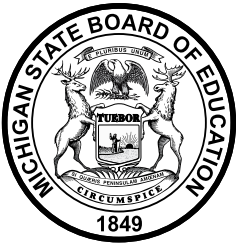


2024 Annual Report  
**Camp Tuhsmeheeta**



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Camp Tuhsmeheeta would like to thank State Superintendent Michael F. Rice, Ph.D., and State Board of Education members for their continued support. Special acknowledgment and gratitude are extended to Deputy Superintendent Michele Harmala, State Board of Education Member/Trustee Nikki Snyder, and Office of Financial Management Director Spencer Simmons.





## Jill Teegardin

### Camp Tuhsmeheeta Director

Fifty years ago, Camp Tuhsmeheeta (Camp T) began offering overnight camps. During the day, campers splashed in the cool water of Flannigan Lake and hiked along the many trails. In the evening, campers sang songs around the campfire before retreating to their tents under the stars, listening to barred owls calling and crickets chirping. As they awoke each morning to bird calls and the rising sun, campers felt a sense of accomplishment. Memories like these are still made today and will continue for generations to come.

I often think about how many campers have passed through Camp T's gates over the past 50 years. I have heard many stories from former campers and staff about how Camp T has made a difference in their lives. Camp T has provided security for campers and has helped boost their confidence. Lessons have been learned, skills have been mastered, and countless memories have been made. Lifelong friendships have also formed.

The past 50 years have brought new programs, buildings, and experiences to Camp T. Campers experience waterfront activities, a challenge course, a climbing tower, a recreation center, a sports field, a dining hall, and a new science and nature center. Over the next 50 years, Camp T will continue to be an outdoor education and recreation destination for students around Michigan. Here's to 50 more years!



# Roxanne Balfour

Low Incidence Outreach Director

Camp Tuhsmeheeta’s 50th anniversary has been celebrated in many ways this year. This report offers just a glimpse of some activities we’ve done to honor this milestone. It feels surreal that 50 years ago, Dr. Robert Thompson, then-superintendent of the Michigan School for the Blind, had a vision to provide more opportunities to students who are Blind or Visually Impaired. Today, that vision is still thriving and continues to change the lives of children.

Throughout the year, we not only reminisced about how Camp T was created but also celebrated its growth. Over the years, new additions and features have encouraged campers to foster friendships, step out of their comfort zones, and experience all that camp has to offer.

As Camp T has evolved and grown in programming and facilities, it has continued to provide outdoor education and recreation programs with a focus on students in Michigan who are Blind or Visually Impaired (BVI) or who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing (DHH).

Looking ahead, we remain committed to enriching campers’ lives and creating lasting memories for many more years to come.



## Camp T Usage

1,552

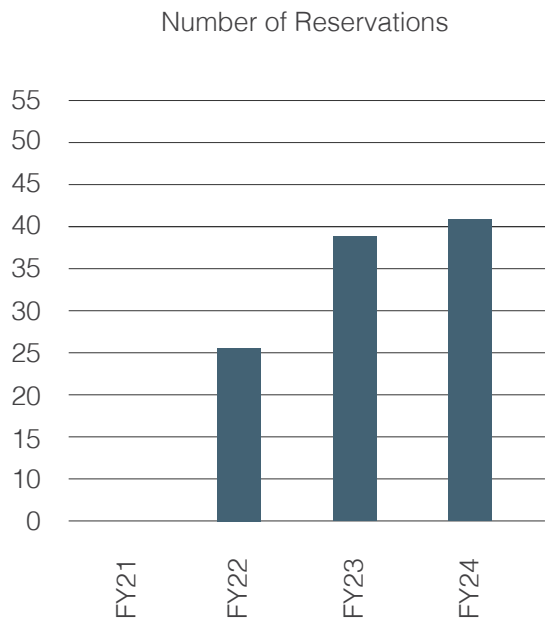
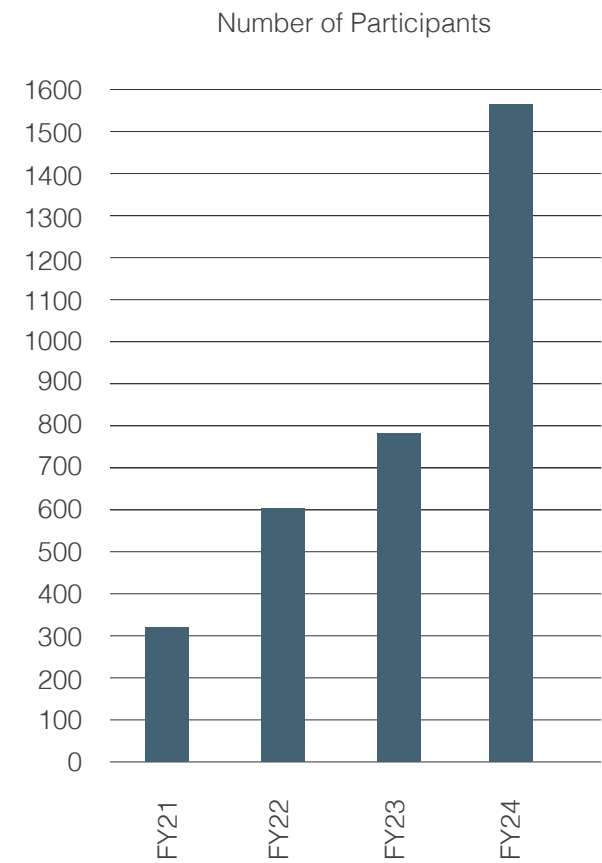
Participants

41

Reservations

































14

Camp T Events



**Note:** The data in this report covers events held between October 1 and July 31 each fiscal year.

# User Groups

<b>West Oakview</b>  87 Campers  1 Reservation	<b>Highlands Middle School</b>  113 Campers  1 Reservation
<b>Birding by Ear</b>  15 Campers  1 Reservation	<b>BLS 6060 Graduate Class</b>  8 Campers  1 Reservation
<b>Cub Scout Pack 3228</b>  45 Campers  1 Reservation	<b>Curious Clovers 4H Club</b>  75 Campers  1 Reservation
<b>DHH Professional Development</b>  38 Participants  1 Reservation	<b>DHH Student Camp</b>  16 Campers  1 Reservation
<b>Flight of Hope Chrysalis</b>  6 Campers  1 Reservation	<b>FNC: Anderson &amp; Girls Orchard</b>  25 Campers  1 Reservation
<b>FNC: Basic Home Maintenance</b>  12 Campers  1 Reservation	<b>Kent ISD BVI Department</b>  42 Campers  1 Reservation
<b>Michigan Blind Athletic Association</b>  44 Campers  3 Reservations	<b>MDE-LIO Staff Picnic</b>  43 Campers  1 Reservation
<b>Mr. Daryl's Summer School</b>  19 Participants  1 Reservation	<b>North Godwin Elementary</b>  142 Campers  1 Reservation

<b>American Heritage Girls</b>  55 Campers  1 Reservation	<b>Bureau of Services for Blind Persons</b>  72 Campers  5 Reservations
<b>DHH Family Camp</b>  34 Campers  1 Reservation	<b>Fine Arts Camp</b>  20 Campers  1 Reservation
<b>Youth Goalball Camp</b>  14 Campers  1 Reservation	<b>Camp Greenwood</b>  32 Participants  1 Reservation
<b>Moms or Family Weekend</b>  8 Campers  1 Reservation	<b>Office of Special Education</b>  25 Campers  1 Reservation

# User Groups

<b>Ottawa ISD</b>  149 Campers  2 Reservations	<b>BVI Outdoor Adventure Camp</b>  30 Campers  1 Reservation	<b>Little Explorers</b>  41 Campers  2 Reservations
<b>Camp T Seasonal Open Houses</b>  61 Campers  2 Reservations	<b>BVI/DHH Winter and Spring Kits</b>  241 Participants  2 Programs	<b>Troop 8228</b>  40 Campers  2 Reservations

## Thank you, volunteers!

Camp T would like to thank all of our volunteers for their dedication and hard work. Their selflessness and enthusiasm have helped create unforgettable experiences for our campers. We appreciate the time, effort, and positive energy our volunteers bring to camp each day. Their passion and commitment are truly inspiring, and we couldn't have asked for a better team.



# Orientation and Mobility

Camp T has approximately seven miles of hiking trails within 300 acres. Traversing the grounds is part of the excitement of visiting camp. While walking the trails, campers use their senses to engage with their surroundings. For example, while approaching the newly restored Thompson Bridge, campers may notice the scent of pine boards or feel the cushion of pine needles while walking the trail to the birding deck. Campers also have the opportunity to test their orientation and mobility skills while navigating around camp. New campers often feel uneasy at the start, but by the end of a camp session, they appear more confident using mobility strategies to get around camp.

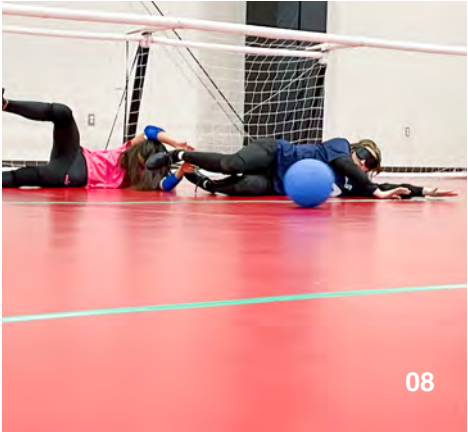
While walking the trails at camp this summer, campers were asked to make observations using their senses. Here are their responses:

- “I like to listen to the birds while we are hiking.”
- “I can feel rocks under my feet.”
- “I can smell the wood from the bridge and the water under it.”
- “It’s always a long walk, but the trails get us to where we need to go.”
- “I can hear people talking while we walk.”
- “Sometimes bugs buzz me.”

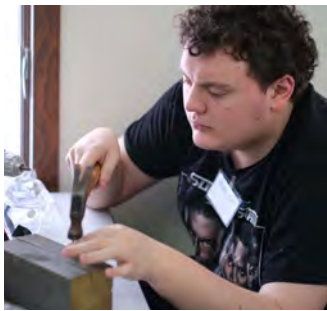


# Goalball

Camp T’s official-sized goalball court, located in Oak Recreation Center, is used by a variety of groups throughout the year. Goalball is a team sport designed specifically for athletes with visual impairments and is a camp highlight for many of our campers. Played indoors on a court with tactile markings, this fast-paced game involves two three-player teams. Participants wear blackout eye masks to ensure a level playing field. The objective is to throw a ball embedded with bells into the opposing team’s goal while defenders try to block it using their bodies. Players rely on the sound of the bells to track the ball’s movement. The game emphasizes auditory awareness, teamwork, and strategic play.





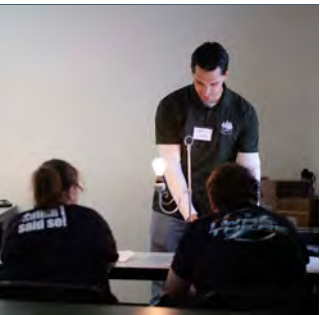
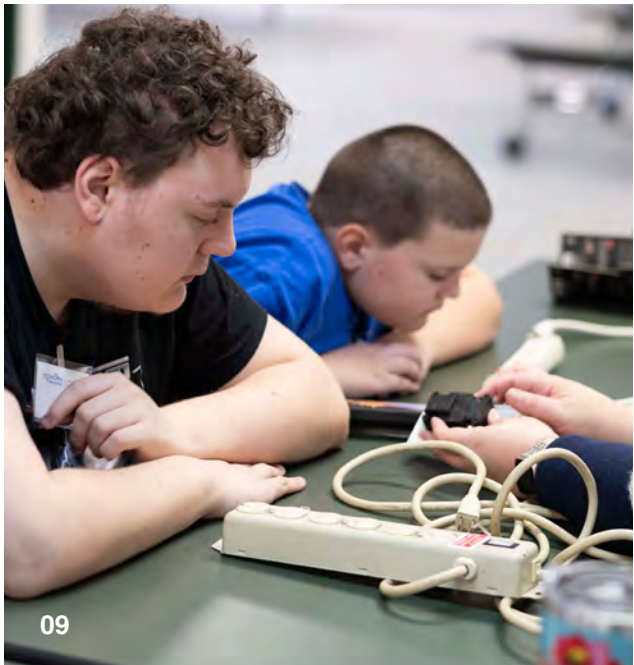


# Independent Living Skills

In January, families participated in a Family Nature Club: Basic Home Maintenance workshop. One of the significant aspects of independent living for people who are Blind or Visually Impaired is that they may not have the same opportunities to observe and learn how various tasks are performed from their family or peers, such as cooking, cleaning, or home maintenance. This weekend program offered families and teens an opportunity to learn basic home maintenance skills in an adapted format within a supportive environment.

This event offered hands-on experience for participants to learn skills such as using a hammer, screwdriver, and adhesive hooks; plugging electronics into outlets; changing batteries; understanding the importance of smoke detectors; and more. Presenters discussed safety considerations and demonstrated a variety of adaptations. Participants even built bird houses using their new skills. Families also had an opportunity to meet with local fire department staff, explore a fire truck, and explore fire-fighting equipment. Each family received no-cut gloves and a toolkit with basic tools they could use to practice their new skills.

In the upcoming year, watch for Tool Tidbits with Tyler, a new video series showcasing home maintenance skills.





# DHH Summer Camp

Camp T kicked off the summer season with a weekend camp in June for middle-school and high-school students who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing (DHH). Seven students from across the state experienced a weekend of fun and new experiences. This camp was the first time most of the students had attended an overnight event at Camp T.

During the camp, students were challenged to work together to complete a scavenger hunt and achieve their goals on various challenge courses. They pushed their own comfort levels while navigating the ropes course and scaling the climbing tower. A few campers even hit a bullseye at the archery range. Joy was in the air at the Flannigan Lake waterfront, where students swam, canoed, and fished. A little rain didn't stop the fun; everyone transitioned smoothly to indoor activities, such as making duct tape bags, performing paper bag skits, and completing an "escape room" challenge. The favorite board game of the weekend was Clue.

Camp T is planning to host an annual DHH summer camp for students to connect, challenge themselves, and enjoy the outdoors. We hope that more campers will join us in the future.

Surveys are completed after every event. Here's feedback we received from a parent:

"This was such a great experience and he loved it so much and is so excited to go back again ... After this experience, I feel so much more confident in him being apart from us. Thank you!"





# BVI Adventure Camp

What a great time to be outdoors! On June 23–26, Camp T hosted its third annual Outdoor Adventure Camp, with a record number of campers attending compared to the past two years. Campers enjoyed hiking, swimming, canoeing, arts and crafts, archery, rock wall climbing, field games, campfire songs and treats, challenge courses, team-building activities, and much more. Some also opted to set up their own tents to experience sleeping under the stars. One camp highlight was an early morning bird hike, where Camp T volunteer and birding guide Donna Posont enlightened the campers to the many sounds, habitats, and stories of birds around camp. They explored woodpecker holes and food that birds like to eat. They even discovered a hidden robin’s nest with blue eggs inside!

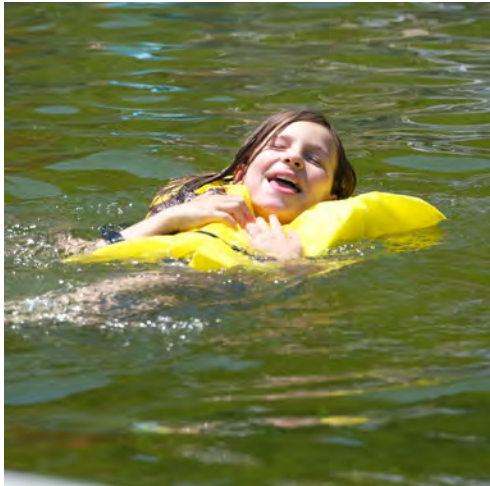
At the end of the four-day, three-night camp, our outdoor adventurers were sad to leave but were happy with the fun they had, the great food and snacks they ate, and the friends they made, along with many lifelong memories.

**Here’s what we heard from parents and students about this event:**

“I talked with different people. I slept at a cabin and a tent, and it was so much fun.”  
- Student

“Our daughter learned independence and gained self confidence!” - Parent

“Camp was amazing. So many new experiences and saw so much growth in the area of independence!” - Parent







# Little Explorers

This spring, Camp T welcomed young children and their families to a new event series called Little Explorers. Families with children ages birth to five who are Blind/Visually Impaired or Deaf/Hard of Hearing enjoyed a morning exploration of nature, stories, songs, and activities.

Our theme for April was *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*. Children learned a song about the life cycle of a butterfly and enjoyed creating caterpillar headbands, making food at the play kitchen, and blowing bubbles. Our snack included fruits the caterpillar character enjoyed, such as apples, strawberries, and watermelon. Families were sent home with a copy of the book and activities to continue learning.

May's theme was *Going on a Bear Hunt*. After listening to the story, families experienced it themselves by going on their own "bear hunt." Children touched the cold grass, squished their hands in mud, and threw white cotton snowballs. The bear-shaped balloon was found in the back of a tent and received hugs from children for being a nice bear. The fun continued with stations where children could learn more about real bears, touch a bear's fur, and create a textured bear hunt experience map.

Five Little Explorers events are planned for the 2024-2025 school year. We would love to have more children and families join us for play, learning, and experiencing nature. We hope children enjoy the amazing experiences Camp T has to offer and will return for new event opportunities as they continue to grow.



## Here's what we heard from parents about this event:

"This was a blast and amazing source of community! Looking forward to the next one!"

"This was awesome. It was great meeting other families as we don't get to do that. We loved everything from the themed lunch to the activity stations. It was a GREAT event."



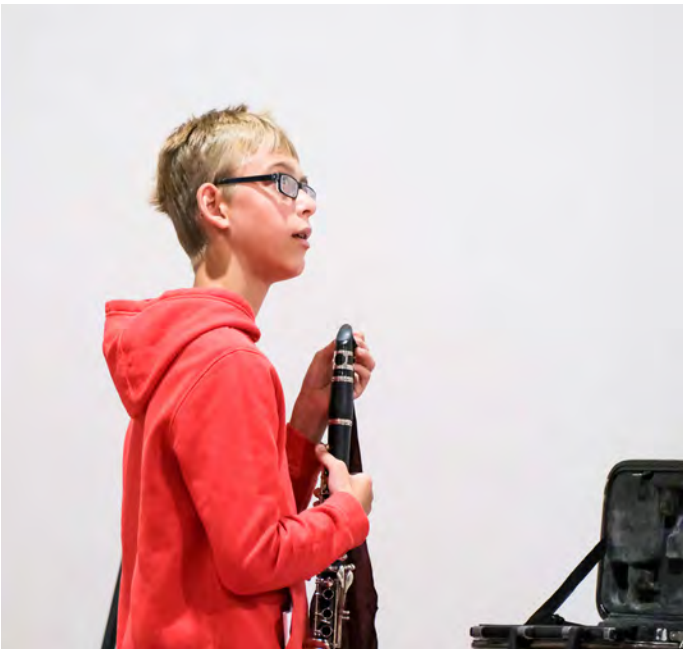
# Fine Arts Camp

In mid-July, Camp T was filled with music and laughter as campers enjoyed their first camp dedicated to fine arts. Theater, art, set design, and musical talents came together in just four days. Not only were students encouraged to bring and play their own instruments, but many other instruments were also on display for them to experience.

Campers, parents, and loved ones were treated to a picnic lunch followed by a camper-led talent performance and then a play that combined everything they learned and created at camp. Campers were proud to show off their clay sculptures and took them home at the end of camp. In addition to fine arts, campers enjoyed some traditional camp activities such as the challenge course and swimming in the lake on a beautiful sunny day. The days went by quickly, and both campers and counselors said they are already looking forward to more fine arts camps in the future.

Here’s what we heard from a parent about this event:

“He loved the swimming and performing. As parents, the performance was great! Would have loved for it to be a little longer even.”

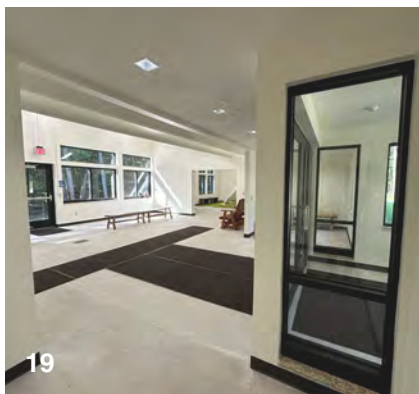




# Nature Center

After much anticipation, Camp T's new Sassafras Science and Nature Center received its final occupancy permit in July. This building will provide a space for visitors to explore science-related concepts and learn about Michigan plants and wildlife. This spring, the Michigan Department of Natural Resources transferred several wildlife mounts to camp so campers can interact with them up close.

The nature center will house a water table, where campers will gain knowledge about watersheds; a small meeting space for formal education programs; a reading area with a tent; and lots of windows for people who are sighted to observe wildlife. Images shown here reflect the beginning stages of bringing in rustic benches and shelving, a variety of natural artifacts, and a reading corner with a small tent, books, and tree-slice cushions for seating.





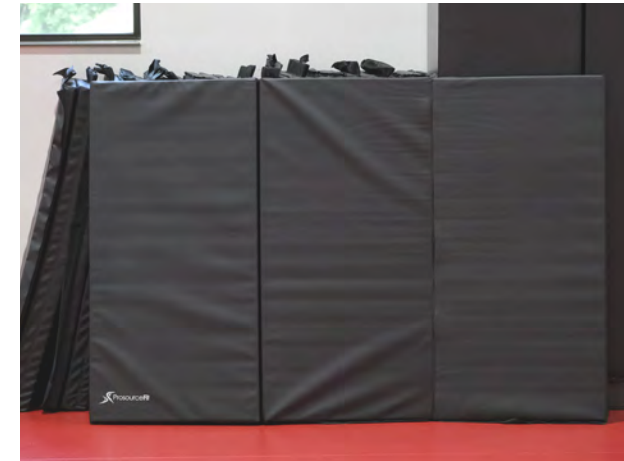
# Facility Updates

## Completed in 2024:

- Purchased new John Deere Gator with a plow
- Updated Thompson Bridge
- Finished constructing new Sassafras Science and Nature Center (SSNC)
- Transferred mounts for SSNC from Department of Natural Resources
- Installed benches, coat hooks, and shelving in SSNC
- Installed carpet runners in SSNC
- Installed carpet, book bench, and tent for reading area at SSNC
- Purchased smart TV for SSNC
- Purchased smart TV and cart for White Pine Lodge
- Updated roof, gutters, and lighting in Roth Cabin
- Added new picnic tables to Red Pine Pavilion
- Built and installed railing at whale watch platform
- Built and installed railing near rocks at the waterfront
- Installed new buried internet lines for Tamarack Lodge, SSNC, and Elm Hall
- Installed new modems and routers at Tamarack Lodge, SSNC, Elm Hall, and White Pine Lodge
- Purchased new tumbling mats, fitness bands, and beeper for basketball net at Oak Recreation Center
- Installed sand filters for White Pine Lodge, Tamarack Lodge, and SSNC
- Replaced dish machine heat exchanger in White Pine Lodge
- Built sound-dampening panels for SSNC
- Replaced circulating pump on the boiler in Birch Lodge
- Updated signs around camp
- Cleared archery range after snowstorm
- Removed fallen trees around camp
- Made repairs to climbing wall
- Replaced accordion walls in cabins
- Moved door on Red Pine Pavilion

## Planned for 2025:

- Install fence on back side of SSNC
- Purchase a riding lawn mower
- Purchase benches for cabin deck
- Purchase a 16-foot trailer
- Add educational displays to SSNC
- Update archery range





# Staff



**Jason Barnes**  
Maintenance Lead

Jason is responsible for ensuring the upkeep, cleanliness, and functionality of all camp facilities and equipment. He performs routine inspections, repairs, and maintenance tasks to provide a safe and comfortable environment for campers.



**Teri Dykstra**  
Contracted Greenville Public School Food and Nutrition Lead

Teri is responsible for creating nutritious and delicious meal plans for campers. She coordinates with camp management to ensure an efficient and well-organized food preparation process.



**Patti Ensing**  
Office Assistant

Patti assists with various administrative tasks, including managing phone calls, emails, and camper registrations. She maintains organized records, coordinates schedules, and provides excellent customer service to campers and families.



**Leanne Merren**  
Camp Assistant

Leanne supports the planning and execution of various camp events and activities. She coordinates logistics and ensures a smooth and enjoyable experience for campers.



**Tyler Merren**  
Contracted Staff Member

Tyler is a Team USA goalball Paralympian. He regularly assists camp programs and teaches goalball. He emphasizes technique, teamwork, and sportsmanship to promote skill development and an enjoyable experience for all participants.



**Tim Nielsen**  
Maintenance Assistant

Tim completes part-time maintenance work around Camp T. He assists with small building projects, mowing, trimming, and general maintenance duties.



**Matt Polzin**  
Camp Consultant (High Adventure Consultant)

Matt provides expertise and guidance in outdoor adventure activities. He assesses safety protocols, recommends adventure options, and ensures memorable experiences for all campers.

# Congratulations

Congratulations to Camp T volunteers John Metz and Teresa Gest, who received the 2024 Michigan Association for Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind/Visually Impaired Award! This well-deserved recognition is a testament to your hard work and dedication to supporting students who are Blind/Visually Impaired. Your contributions have made a significant impact, and we are proud to celebrate this achievement with you.







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