

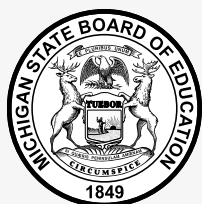


2025 Annual Report

Camp Tuhsmehta

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The Michigan Department of Education Resource for Blind/
Low Vision and Resource for Deaf/Hard of Hearing (MDE
RBLV and RDHH) are partially funded under the *Individuals
with Disabilities Education Act* through the Michigan
Department of Education Office of Special Education.



As State Superintendent Michael F. Rice, Ph.D., approaches retirement, Camp Tuhsmeheeta would like to extend a very special thanks for the tremendous support he has given throughout his tenure. His support has been and will continue to be greatly valued. A special acknowledgment is also extended to the State Board of Education (SBE), Deputy Superintendent Michele Harmala, SBE Trustee Nikki Snyder, and Office of Financial Management Director Spencer Simmons.



Jill Teegardin

Camp Tuhsmeheeta Director

Common ravens are highly intelligent birds that are often found in northern Michigan. They are less common in the Greenville area, where Camp Tuhsmeheeta (Camp T) is located. Last year, a pair of ravens built a nest in the trees at camp. This year, five have been spotted and heard along the trails and roadways around camp.

Ravens are large, black-feathered birds with a low, gurgling call. They have thick bills and shaggy feathers around their throats. Known for their

intelligence, ravens are clever creatures that appear in myths and legends, often representing transformation, insight, wisdom, creativity, intuition, and mystery.

Their characteristics remind me of the campers who visit Camp T each year. Our campers often arrive not knowing what to expect and leave with more knowledge and wisdom after trying new things and stepping outside their comfort zones. It is exciting to witness these transformations.

When I hear the ravens around camp or pass by them on the trails, I think about how they represent the students we serve, their inquisitiveness, intelligence, and creativity. I think about our campers transforming into successful and confident young people who will go on to positively impact those around them.



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.



Roxanne Balfour

MDE RBLV and RDHH Director

When people hear the word “camp,” several thoughts and images come to mind: pine trees, the smell of a campfire, sticky s’mores, friends gathering, and, yes, sometimes bugs. But what makes Camp Tuhsmeheeta so special beyond all the common camp experiences is the sanctuary it becomes for kids who just want to be kids. There are no labels placed on the children and youth who attend; they are who they are without limitations or barriers. They may arrive uncertain of who they will meet or what they will do, but they depart having made new friends, learned how to fish, climbed a tower, or played goalball, just to name a few experiences. This report includes the data we need to provide, but it doesn’t show the laughter, excitement, or joy of the children and youth we serve as they challenge themselves to reach new heights they may never have thought possible.

Roxanne Balfour

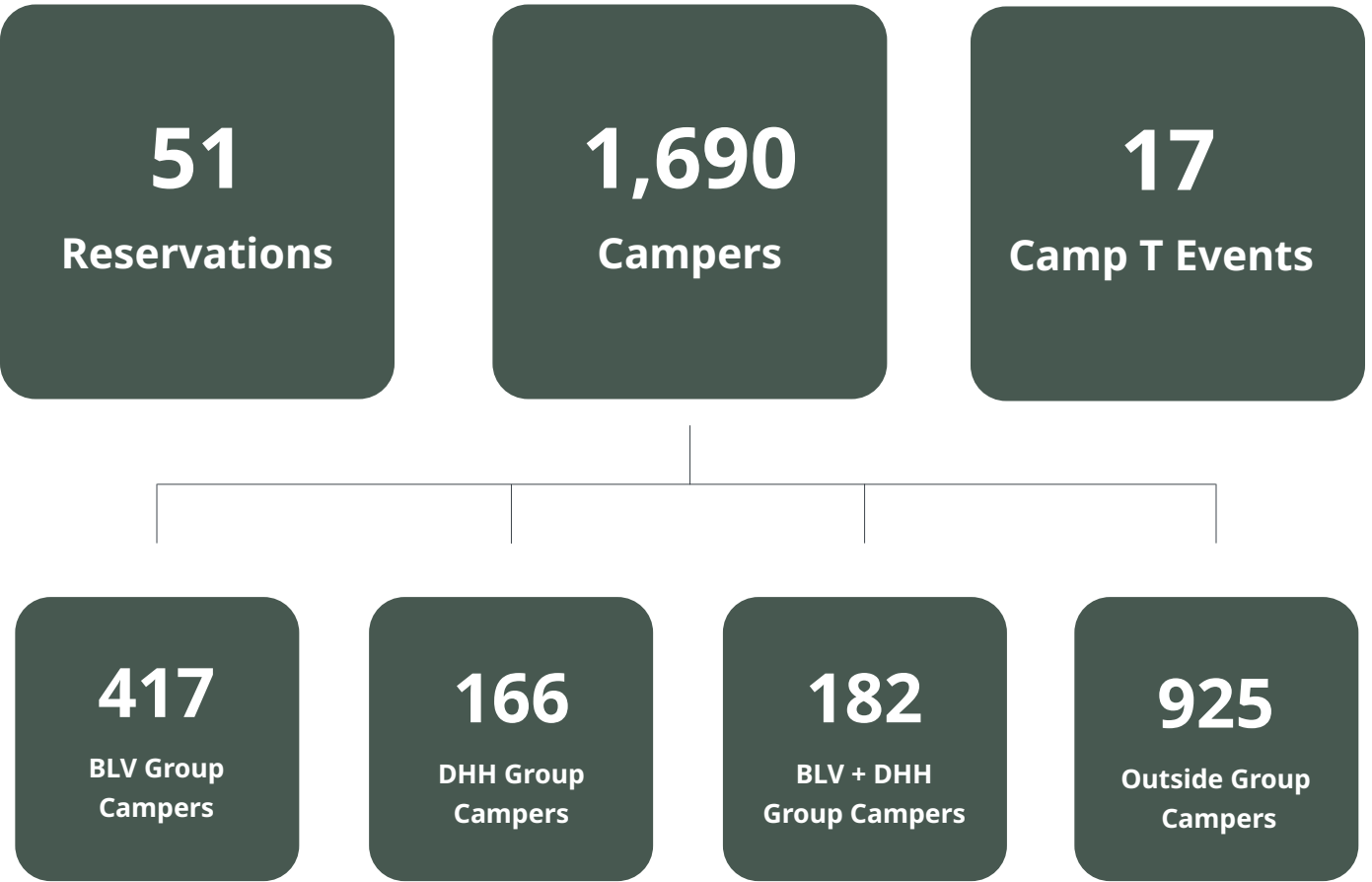
Director

Michigan Department of Education

Resource for Blind/Low Vision and Resource for Deaf/Hard of Hearing

Camp T Usage

July 1, 2024 - June 30, 2025



Blind/Low Vision (BLV) Groups:

These include Camp T events, the Michigan Blind Athletic Association (MBAA), and school groups that focus on students who are BLV.

Deaf/Hard of Hearing (DHH) Groups:

These include Camp T events, Camp Chris Williams, and school groups that focus on programming for students who are DHH.

BLV + DHH Groups:

These include Camp T events, such as Little Explorers and Roots to Wings, that provide opportunities for families with campers who are BLV or DHH to come together, share experiences, and enjoy educational programming at Camp T.

Outside Groups:

These include schools, scout troops, universities, and other organizations that focus on educational programming for campers who are not BLV or DHH.

User Groups

Allegan Area ESA

Campers: 19
Audience: Outside Group
Reservations: 1

Alumni Picnic

Campers: 31
Audience: BLV
Reservations: 1

BSBP First Stay Away

Campers: 24
Audience: BLV
Reservations: 1

Camp Chris Williams

Campers: 50
Audience: DHH
Reservations: 1

Camp Greenwood

Campers: 32
Audience: BLV
Reservations: 1

Connecting with Confidence

Campers: 10
Audience: BLV
Reservations: 1

Cub Scout Pack 3228

Campers: 49
Audience: Outside Group
Reservations: 1

DHH Family Camp

Campers: 19
Audience: DHH
Reservations: 1

DHH Student Camp

Campers: 31
Audience: DHH
Reservations: 1

East Grand Rapids Football

Campers: 50
Audience: Outside Group
Reservations: 1

Fall Farm and Forest

Campers: 54
Audience: BLV and DHH
Reservations: 1

Fine Arts Camp

Campers: 20
Audience: BLV
Reservations: 1

Flat River Academy

Campers: 120
Audience: Outside Group
Reservations: 2

Flight of Hope Chrysalis

Campers: 6
Audience: Outside Group
Reservations: 1

Family Nature Club

Campers: 11
Audience: BLV
Reservations: 1

Girl Scout Troop 4304

Campers: 18
Audience: Outside Group
Reservations: 1

Greenville Public Schools

Campers: 25
Audience: Outside Group
Reservations: 1

Highland Middle School

Campers: 400
Audience: Outside Group
Reservations: 4

Kent County ISD

Campers: 48
Audience: BLV
Reservations: 1

Little Explorers

Campers: 64
Audience: BLV and DHH
Reservations: 5

MBAA

Campers: 61
Audience: BLV
Reservations: 8

COSB Outreach Forum

Campers: 21
Audience: Outside Group
Reservations: 1

Office of Special Education

Campers: 43
Audience: Outside Group
Reservations: 1

Support Team Event

Campers: 22
Audience: BLV
Reservations: 1

Roots to Wings

Campers: 8
Audience: BLV and DHH
Reservations: 1

Mr. Daryl's Summer School

Campers: 19
Audience: BLV
Reservations: 1

North Godwin Elementary

Campers: 147
Audience: Outside Group
Reservations: 2

East Grand Rapids Football

Campers: 50
Audience: Outside Group
Reservations: 1

Ottawa Area ISD

Campers: 85
Audience: BLV
Reservations: 1

Ottawa Area ISD

Campers: 66
Audience: DHH
Reservations: 1

Outdoor Adventure Camp

Campers: 32
Audience: BLV
Reservations: 1

Seasonal Open Houses

Campers: 56
Audience: BLV and DHH
Reservations: 2

Soaring Above Teen Center

Campers: 18
Audience: Outside Group
Reservations: 1

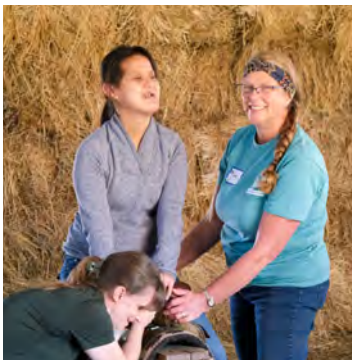
Survive and Thrive Camp

Campers: 23
Audience: BLV
Reservations: 1

Western Michigan University

Campers: 8
Audience: Outside Group
Reservations: 1





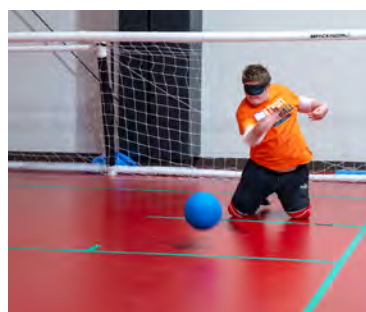
Goalball: An All-Inclusive Sport

Within the blind/low vision (BLV) community, goalball holds a special place among those who enjoy competitive sports. Interest in the game has been rapidly growing in Michigan thanks to the combined outreach efforts of the Michigan Blind Athletic Association (MBAA), Camp T, and five-time Paralympian Tyler Merren and his wife, Leanne, who work with both organizations to educate students and youth about the sport.

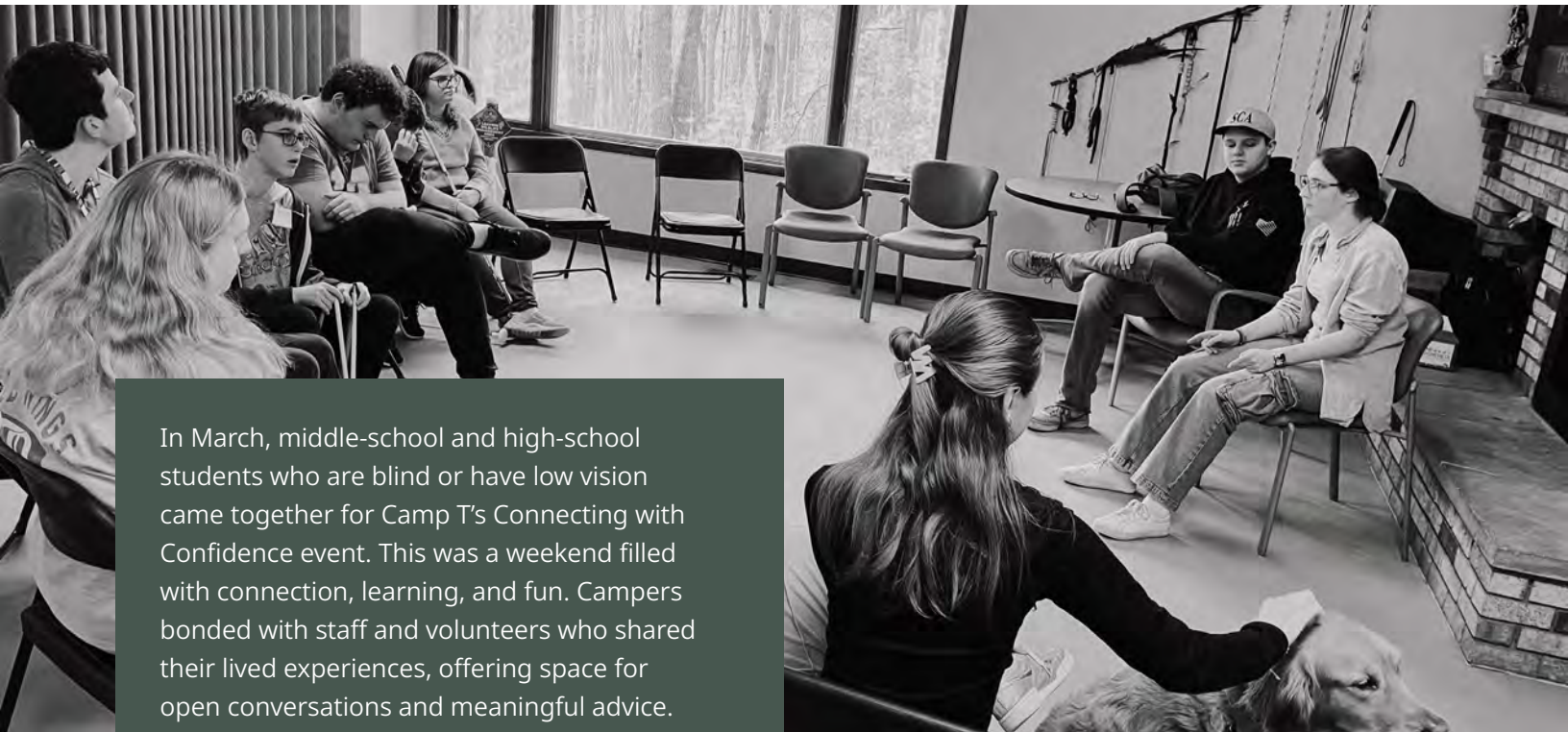
Goalball is played on a surface the size of a tennis court, with goal nets on each end spanning the full width. Each team has three players who use their sense of hearing to defend the net, as all participants wear blindfolds regardless of their vision level. The basketball-sized goalball contains bells to help players track it by sound. Teams take turns rolling the ball, bowling-style, toward the other team's net. The court is marked by a series of tactile lines so players can orient themselves.

The great thing about goalball is that just about anyone can play. Because everyone is blindfolded, the playing field is leveled, allowing students with low or no vision to compete against their peers. This is why many schools with students who are BLV have requested adaptive sports introductions from Camp T. Our staff have visited several schools to set up, demonstrate, and facilitate adaptive sports for everyone to play. Likewise, many school groups have visited Camp T to learn basic goalball skills in Oak Recreation Center.

MBAA hosts a popular weeklong sports camp each spring that is filled with fun adaptive sports and recreational activities, including goalball, for Michigan youth who are BLV to enjoy. Camp T staff volunteer at the event to support and collaborate with sports leaders from around the state. It is a great opportunity for students to explore the broader network of adaptive sports and potentially compete at higher levels. We might even discover the next Michigan Paralympian who will follow in the footsteps of the recently retired Tyler Merren!



Connecting with Confidence Event



In March, middle-school and high-school students who are blind or have low vision came together for Camp T's Connecting with Confidence event. This was a weekend filled with connection, learning, and fun. Campers bonded with staff and volunteers who shared their lived experiences, offering space for open conversations and meaningful advice. They practiced social skills like table etiquette and introductions, explored fashion trends, and learned the Cha-Cha Slide with help from local dance students. Saturday night featured a formal dinner, a Hollywood-themed photo booth, and a dance DJ'd by camp volunteer Josh Harrington. By the end of the weekend, campers had made meaningful connections and created memories that will last a lifetime.



Cool Things at Camp T in Winter



As cold weather settles in across Michigan, camping outdoors might not be the first activity that comes to mind. Instead, campers and families enjoy warm meals in White Pine Lodge, sleep in cozy cabins, play games by the fireplace in White Pine Lodge, and enjoy classic campfire treats at Center Island.

During the day, campers snowshoe along seven miles of trails at camp, spot animal tracks, and stop by Sassafras Science and Nature Center to warm up and learn about Michigan wildlife. Campers also sled down snow-covered trails and head over to Oak Recreation Center for indoor games.

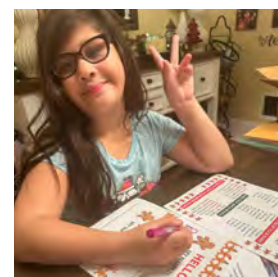
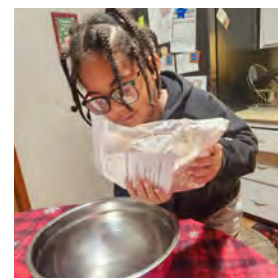
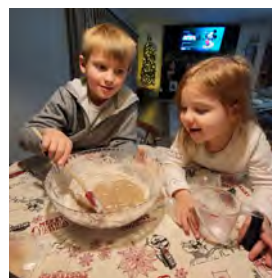
Camp T offers endless year-round possibilities for fun and adventure. Winter is a special time to bond, learn, and explore, and Camp T is the perfect place to shake off the winter blues.



Deck the Winter Kits

Families of children who are blind or have low vision (BLV), who are deaf or hard of hearing (DHH), or who are deafblind (DB) from across Michigan enjoyed participating in Camp T's *Deck the Winter* at-home kits. *We're Going on a Gingerbread Hunt* by Anna Membrino served as the theme for the kit.

Participants received a variety of fun and engaging activities, including Gingerbread Bingo, a story map, scented modeling clay, a salt ornament-making kit, and a science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) boat-building challenge. Families were also encouraged to attend an online event to connect with each other. During the event, families shared their gingerbread names, read an interactive story while completing a tactile story map, and shared plenty of laughter.



A total of 50 families received kits: 18 DHH, 20 BLV, and 12 DB.



Survive and Thrive Camp

In April, Camp T invited families of children who are blind/low vision (BLV) to attend a camp designed to test their survival and problem-solving skills. Families worked together to climb perilous “rocky cliffs,” cross “raging rivers,” navigate wobbly ropes over “deep canyons,” build shelters with limited supplies scavenged along the way, and finally, sail a makeshift boat across a vast “ocean” back to civilization. Families also learned creative ways to build a fire, cook tasty treats, and purify drinking water (without the help of a volleyball named Wilson). With only each other to rely on, everyone played an important role in survival.

Of course, these were all simulated scenarios, and everyone made it through unscathed. In fact, there is little chance this much laughter and fun would accompany a real-life survival situation. Campers had fun learning about cooperation and teamwork, as well as how to think out of the box when facing challenges. Families grew closer and made good friends along the way. Like in life, we face plenty of stressful and unplanned events that test our ability to endure. But we are not alone; with the support of family and friends, we can not only survive but also thrive.





From participants:

"The experience from the mom overnight event was truly life changing. I learned about so many new resources to help my child and to have a safe place to be around other moms who have children with low vision/blindness was so incredible. I don't feel so alone trying to navigate my daughter's future."

"This event was amazing; beyond my wildest expectations I just wish there was more time!"

"The event was AMAZING and uplifting and encouraging!!! Can't wait for next year!!!

Roots to Wings Event

In April, women raising children who are blind or have low vision, or who are deaf or hard of hearing, ventured to camp to connect, have fun, and relax.

Activities included yoga, crafts, the challenge course, board games, and time around the campfire. Participants shared stories, resources, and plenty of laughter. Phone numbers were exchanged, and group chats were created. Everyone left feeling supported, seen, and heard.



DHH Summer Fun Camp

In June 2025, Camp T offered the second annual DHH Summer Fun Camp, an overnight experience for students who are deaf or hard of hearing (DHH). Eighteen middle-school and high-school students from across the state came together for a weekend of outdoor adventures, laughter, and meaningful connections.

Students worked together to navigate different communication styles and conquer the “muse crossing” challenge, which required the group to use long boards and small platforms to cross an imaginary raging river. An afternoon at the waterfront featured canoeing and fishing on Flannigan Lake. The fish were biting, and calm water made for an easy boat cruise around the lake’s boundaries.

We plan to continue growing this summer program and provide more opportunities for students who are DHH to connect with each other and the outdoors.



Fall Farm and Forest Adventures



Fall brought many adventurous families to Greenville to enjoy horseback riding at Starfish Ranch and explore the forest at Camp T. Families of students who are blind or have low vision and students who are deaf or hard of hearing had the opportunity to engage in outdoor programming at camp and learn about horses on the farm.

While at camp, families hiked the trails, canoed, fished, and explored the nature center. At the ranch, they learned about horse care and tack, rode horses, and enjoyed a wagon ride. It was a day full of adventures, and we can guarantee the participants slept well after their fun-filled experience!

Little Explorers Playgroup

Throughout the school year, children, ages 0-5, who are blind/low vision or deaf/hard of hearing and their families were invited again to Camp T for the Little Explorers playgroup. Five themed events took place, including *Barnyard Dance*, *Leafy Adventures*, *Fish Frenzy*, *Wings and Wonders*, and *Petals and Playtime*.

Each event featured story time, songs, gross and fine motor activity bins, nature exploration, movement stations, and more. Many families attended multiple events, and new friendships formed along the way.

Little Explorers will continue throughout the 2025–2026 school year as Camp T remains committed to connecting with Michigan's littlest explorers.





Staff Training

In 2025, Camp T Director Jill Teegardin and High-Adventure Consultant Matt Polzin have participated in several trainings to enhance the camp experience and provide an even higher level of service for our campers.

Both Jill and Matt hold archery instructor certifications through USA Archery: Jill at Level II and Matt at Level I. Their certifications include SafeSport training for coaches, and both recently completed recertification, ensuring campers can continue to enjoy one of Camp T's favorite activities.

Jill was recertified as Camp T's health officer, which included 20 hours of online training through the American Red Cross along with a day of in-person skill assessments. Camp T volunteer Teresa Gest also completed the health officer training and will be able to serve as a health officer during student events.

In March, Matt earned his Level II Practitioner certification from the Association of Challenge Course Technology (ACCT) Level II after completing a five-day course in Lake Geneva, Wisconsin. This course is only open to those who have the requisite experience in challenge courses, including high and low ropes, zip lines, and other high-risk activities.

Matt will also recertify as an American Heart Association lifeguard this fall. This includes water rescues, first aid, CPR, and supplemental oxygen use. He continues to serve as the waterfront supervisor and lifeguard for all Camp T-sponsored programs.





DTMB Partners

Camp Tuhsmeheeta would like to recognize the State of Michigan's Department of Technology, Management, and Budget (DTMB) for their ongoing support and contributions to camp improvement projects.

Over the past several years, DTMB has played a key role in the following major projects:

- updating the front gate
- building Oak Recreation Center
- building Sassafras Science and Nature Center
- building Hickory Lodge
- assisting with installation of generators throughout the property

Project Director Scott DeKorte and Project Field Representative Adam Droste from DTMB's Design and Construction Division have been instrumental in the success of these projects. We are grateful for their partnership and dedication to helping Camp T continue to grow and serve families across Michigan.

Scott M. DeKorte, R.A., L.L.A.
Design and Construction Division - Project Director

Adam Droste
Design and Construction Division - Project Field Representative





Facility Updates

- Rebuilt Thompson Bridge
- Installed benches at lodges and climbing tower
- Installed air conditioning in White Pine Lodge (kitchen, dining, and lounge areas)
- Purchased woodchipper
- Added soundscaping, rugs, curtains, and a generator in nature center
- Installed educational displays/items in nature center
- Prepared Roth Cabin for chinking
- Purchased new harnesses for smaller campers
- Installed new refrigerator and gas fireplace in White Pine Lodge
- Added and vented hot water booster for dishwasher in White Pine Lodge
- Added fencing around mechanical areas near White Pine Lodge
- Installed new rail on whale watch platform
- Installed fencing at waterfront
- Added stop sign at camp entrance
- Purchased 12-foot trailer
- Purchased a John Deer Lawn Mower
- Installed pull-up bar in Oak Recreation Center
- Updated archery range

Upcoming Projects

- Convert Roth Cabin to a museum commemorating Michigan School for the Blind and Camp T
- Re-shingle roofs at Tamarack Lodge, Red Pine Pavilion, and Jack Pine Pavilion
- Install fencing around nature center
- Install a hammock village
- Purchase Phonak sound system

Camp T 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 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

High-Adventure Camp Consultant

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



Jill Teegardin

Camp Director

Jill oversees all operations of camp, including maintenance, programs, registrations, inspections, and licensing. She works with staff to ensure campers experience camp in a safe and engaging manner.

