

## **INTERVIEW CONTINUED**

**Joe Chamberlain,**

**Executive Director (1982-2014) Camp Weed and Cerveny Conference Center**

**Who were some of the lay men and women who made a difference in the life and development of the camp and conference center? How did they come to be committed to the mission and work of the camp?**

**Joe:** I met my best friend at camp the first year I served. The Rev Michael Ellis was a new priest assigned to Summer Camp and we became fast friends enjoying all the outdoor sports we could squeeze in.

In later years it came time to build more facilities. With a price tag of 5 million dollars a special board was assembled. A professional fund raiser was hired but soon afterward was released. The board didn't think she could get the job done and turned to me. They expected me to raise the 5 million! I had no experience of such things. It was panic time. But they made a good argument. Joe, no one else in the Diocese knows Camp Weed like you do. You've got to do it, and we will help you.

And they did. John Donahoo stepped up along with Patty and were by my side for several years. The Rev. Barnum McCarty and The Rev. Bob Snell were there too. Barnum was director of Camp Weed in the late 1950s for a couple of years. They each had a deep connection to Camp and a strong love for the Diocese. They walked me through the long and arduous process and hardly a day went by without communication and encouragement. In the end, we did it. All of us. Every church in the diocese in some way participated. Communication was key. With the vital help of Virginia Barker, editor of the Diocesan newspaper and Bill Schmidt, an advertising professional, we were able to communicate with the broader Diocese.

But in the midst of all the fund-raising work life at the camp and conference center continued. It was like having two jobs, one during the day and one at night. It was an unbelievable amount of work, but I was fully energized. Sharon frequently found herself entertaining friends and visitors at our home while we attended to camp business.

My board chairs over the years left an indelible mark on me and the camp. Bill Henderson, Bob Scott, Herb Hovey, John Donahoo gave me guidance and one who was by my side in several different roles, Dick Wilkerson. I met John and Dick through Cursillo, and they were like older brothers to me.

When it comes to staff members over my 33 years at camp there is one who stands out among them all. Daniel McMullen is without a doubt the one. Although a little younger than I, his integrity, his work ethic, his commitment and his advice were unwavering characteristics and I depended on him a great deal. We remain in contact and often make plans to share our favorite activity, fishing.

**What was it like 'living above the shop', i.e. living on the Camp Weed site and raising your family at Camp Weed?**

**Joe:** I loved living there. Everything I loved was there, my family, Sharon, Joey and Andy, the beauty of the property, the lake, the wildlife and speaking of wildlife, my friends. Yes, we had lots of visitors to our home, lots. Our boys enjoyed life at camp and to my surprise when they were old enough to attend summer camp, they each had their clothes packed and ready a week before camp started. They loved it.

**As you look at Camp Weed and Cerveny Conference Center, in this 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary year, what are you most thankful for in regard to the institution? What do you see as its chief assets? What are the biggest challenges in negotiating the future of the institution?**

**Joe:** The long and rich history of Camp Weed and later the Cerveny Conference Center and the stories it tells of how relationships were formed are what I am thankful for. The commitment of our Bishops over the years to the camp is the reason why it has survived 100 years. The vision of Bishop Juhan to form the youth camp and help it survive the WWII years and moving the camp a total of six times is in itself amazing. Bishop Cerveny expanded that vision to include a large property centrally located in the diocese and have it serve all the ministries of the diocese and its churches. His formation of diocesan renewal retreats like Cursillo and Happening that occurred at the camp deepened the bonds among youth and adults from across the Diocese. These two bishops are responsible for creating a diocesan family. Church was no longer what you attended on Sunday. It became a way of life and a way for us to relate to fellow believers encountered at the camp and conference center.

Its chief assets? The sheer size and scope of the site along with its rich history are its chief assets. Sadly, its sheer size and scope are its biggest challenges. It was developed over a period of 100 years, growing as the Diocese and its churches grew. That delicate balance of finances and needs was once in place when our church memberships and activities were strong.

Our biggest challenges? I see it as one challenge. It comes down to the next bishop. He or she will need to make the camp a priority. He or she must invest in the formation and growth of an endowment program much like any large institution has with 100 years in operation. This bishop must lead us to believe that if Jesus can bring Lazarus back from the dead, he can certainly revive our beloved camp and conference center.

**What's retirement like? Living in the Live Oak community? Enjoying your family?**

**Joe:** Retirement is pretty darn good. My two sons now live in Live Oak. Joey and Samantha live close by with our three granddaughters. And guess what? They like to fish. Andy is now out of the Army and no longer flying Apache helicopters. Having family close by is a blessing we do not take for granted.

At St Luke's I am able to be more active in my church since I'm not traveling about the Diocese telling the Camp Weed story at other churches on Sundays.

I frequently visit the camp; I was there yesterday-fishing on that beautiful lake. The lake has never looked better. What a gem.