

Happy trails to 125 sing-along campers

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ASTORIA — Sitting around a campfire, a group of children sing songs and do the Camp Rosenbaum hand clap. Some have taken on nicknames like Jazzy Jeff or Young Kingfisher while others have made friendship bracelets for their new best friend.

They began the week with timid steps and bashful smiles and left Friday afternoon with a sense of sadness at their departure understandable to all former campers.

Every year for a week, the military post at Camp Rilea south of Astoria becomes Camp Rosenbaum. During the last 18 years, the Oregon National Guard and the Housing Authority of Portland have helped send a total of 2,000 low-income children to camp.

This year, 125 children, aged 9-12, who live in federally supported housing in Portland and Salem, attended the camp. They came to play and to learn about good citizenship and how to say no to drugs.

"Unfortunately, this is the first time most of these kids have ever seen the ocean," said Fred Rosenbaum, the camp's founder. Rosenbaum began the camp when he was chairman of the Housing Authority of Portland and a major in the Oregon National Guard.

The 100 campers from Portland and the 25 from Salem arrived Sunday and stayed in the barracks — when they weren't camping in the woods and sleeping in tents.

The counselors from the National Guard and the Housing Authority of Portland shared activities with the campers. They fished, went on treasure hunts, visited the aquarium in Seaside and a maritime museum in Astoria, sang songs and talked about the dangers of drugs.



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Melissa Wrisley of Portland enjoys a visit with former Gov. Vic Atiyeh at Camp Rosenbaum.

"The camp is for children who aren't reached by normal youth programs," Rosenbaum said. He said there are about three youngsters to every counselor, but with all the cooks and camp workers there is a one-on-one relationship in most cases.

The camp staff members are encouraged to continue relations only if they can give a real commitment, Rosenbaum said.

"The last thing these kids need is another adult to walk out of their lives," he said.

One counselor is Bruce Prunk. Now in his fourth year at the

camp, Prunk is the day-shift lieutenant of the drugs and vice division for the Portland Police Bureau.

"Usually when I see these kids, I'm serving a search warrant, kicking a door in and looking for drugs," Prunk said. "This lets me interact with the kids in a positive way and, more importantly, it lets the kids interact with a police officer."

The counselors often find the positive interaction as meaningful as the youngsters do.

This year, Prunk met Daryl Hernandez of Portland. Monday, Daryl

caught a large bluegill while fishing. Prunk, in a small ceremony, presented Daryl with a leather tag he had made that said "Kingfish Jr."

"The next day Daryl came up to me and said, 'I just want you to know, Spunky, I really care about you,' and it just made my heart melt," Prunk said.

During the year, Prunk said he gives the campers his telephone number and tells them where he works. "They call or the housing authority calls if a kid is having a problem — in the past few years it's been drugs — and I go and talk to them."