

The Joy of Just Being a Kid

Camp COCO is a Special Camp for Special Kids

Facing cancer is tough, but it's even tougher when you're a kid. Camp COCO (Children's Oncology Camp Organization) is an annual, week-long summer camp for children ages 6-16 who suffer from leukemia and other cancers.

"The camp lets them experience the joy of just being a kid," says Donata Eggers, R.D., director of the Camp for the past three years. Eggers works in SIU's Department of Pediatrics.

Founded, sponsored and staffed in part by SIU School of Medicine's Department of Pediatrics, Camp COCO is completely free of charge for campers, thanks to the generous efforts of individuals, service clubs, businesses and events like The Midwest Charity Horse Show, which

donated \$10,000 to the Camp in January 2001. The Show is Camp COCO's largest donor. Since 1987, the group has contributed \$88,500 to an endowment fund it created for the Camp.

Eggers' goal is to strengthen that endowment fund and use the accumulating interest to ease the need for annual fundraising "to ensure that Camp can continue forever." That fund now totals \$300,000. Approximately \$1 million would secure the future of the Camp.

Additional donations over the past year include the John Mueth, Jr. Trust in Springfield, which contributed \$10,000 to the Camp. Mueth had a strong interest in children, and his trustees at Bank One honor his memory by supporting several charities. To date, Camp COCO has received

\$44,500 from this trust fund.

The board members of the Health Improvement Foundation (HIF) contributed \$5,000 to Camp COCO in September 2000. The Health Improvement Foundation is an organization dedicated to promoting better rural health services and care for people in Illinois. This is the fourth donation HIF has made to Camp COCO. Their gifts total \$19,000.

Proceeds from an annual golf outing planned for June 13 will further support Camp COCO. Last year's event raised \$35,000. "All of our donors help keep camp alive," says Eggers.

The donations cover the costs for each camper, which amount to approximately \$450 per child for the week of camp. "Many of the children





want us to continue the camp for the whole summer, or two weeks instead of one,” says Eggers. “While we can’t do that, the donations let us give them the best camp we can.”

The donations provide more than meals and lodging for the children. They allow the children to experience a time free from hospital beds and laboratories, a chance to run in the sunshine of a warm summer day, to swim, to fish, to play, to dance, to create — to celebrate being a kid.

Nearly 80 children attend the local Camp COCO each year. Held at the Timber Pointe Outdoor Center on Lake Bloomington, last year’s camp served children from 20 central Illinois counties, including Sangamon, Christian, Macoupin and McLean counties.

The children enjoy all the usual summer camp activities: boating, horseback riding, arts and crafts, archery, nature hikes, games and campfires. A pediatric oncologist, nurses, pediatric residents, medical students and other qualified counselors are on-site at all times to assist with the children’s physical, as well as emotional, needs. Now in its 16th year, this year’s camp is set for July 14-20.

“It’s a homecoming for a lot of children,” says Eggers. “The children support each other, and that gives them enthusiasm to keep going. Camp gives these children hope and confidence.” ■

To make a contribution to Camp COCO, contact the SIU Foundation office at 217-782-2955 or send a check payable to Camp COCO, c/o SIU Foundation, P.O. Box 19666, Springfield, IL 62794-9666.

