SILVER LAKE NEWS
SILVER LAKE CONFERENCE CENTER
The Year-Round Outdoor Ministry Program of the Southern New England Conference of the United Church of Christ
223 Low Road, Sharon, CT 06069
860-364-5526 • www.silverlakect.org • slcc@silverlakect.org

SPRING 2021

Helping Out During Covid
Silver Lakers Making a Difference

In a year like no other, Silver Lakers have been stepping up! In this newsletter, we are focusing on stories of campers who are helping out in our communities, alumni who are helping in the fight against Covid-19, and churches who are partnering with Silver Lake in meaningful new ways. We are also celebrating our amazing donors! Silver Lake donors really made a difference in 2020, helping position Silver Lake to reopen in-person camp this summer.

Campers in Their Communities

By Jennifer Kronholm Clark

Silver Lake campers are, in general, a generous, thoughtful, and creative bunch. During this pandemic year, our campers have been finding new ways to make a positive difference in their communities.

Megan Millbauer of Peterborough, N.H., has been working with her church to distribute meals to families in need.

“Before the pandemic, Monday night supper was served and eaten in my church fellowship hall,” Megan said. “I was helping the supper crew by setting up the dinning room.

“When the church figured out how to do takeout I wanted to continue

Vaccine Villages

By Brian Lapis

If you receive your Covid-19 vaccine at one of Connecticut’s large drive-thru clinics, there’s a little bit of Silver Lake in your shot! Griffin Electrical Contractors, owned by Silver Lake alumni Ken and Sean Griffin (Camp Family 1985 and ETF 1986), designed and built the electric infrastructure for Community Health Center’s “vaccine

Church Thanks Frontline Workers

For three evenings in May, Silver Lake will host special dinners to honor local frontline workers for their efforts during this pandemic year. The Christian Action Committee of Salisbury Congregational Church is sponsoring this project.

“I saw that Silver Lake was offering opportunities for families to sign up for times to come out and enjoy the grounds and I thought, wouldn’t it be nice to share this with our frontline workers and their families!” said Brenda Boone of Salisbury. “Silver Lake was wonderful to help me brainstorm how we could offer a special evening including a simple meal out enjoying nature while ensuring our honorees and their guests could feel comfortable attending.”

Employees from the local hospital, elementary school, and groceries stores will come to Silver Lake to enjoy dinner and games around the campfire. Church members will act as greeters and hosts.

“My wish is to offer our church family an opportunity to serve, knowing that when we serve others we give our own hearts a lift at the same time!” Brenda said.

— Jennifer Kronholm Clark

Church Thanks Frontline Workers

Vaccine Villages, Continued on Page 2

Campers, Continued on Page 2

Ken and Sean Griffin (on shoulders) at camp in the 1980s with counselors Rodney Brown and David Gifford and two other campers.

Vaccine Villages, Continued on Page 4
Thank You for Keeping Camp Vibrant

Thank you, Silver Lake. I know it is a bit of a cliche to say that you are Silver Lake, and yet it is completely true. Silver Lake is the community: former campers and staffers; folks who have come on retreat at Silver Lake; the people in our churches; those who love Silver Lake because of what it has done for someone in their life; and so many others who have been shaped by and helped to shape Silver Lake.

It is because of the love and support of this vast and varied community that the ministry at Silver Lake continues to be vibrant, to be able to reinvent itself, and to grow and thrive.

It is wonderful to be able to celebrate just a tiny portion of the incredible work you, the Silver Lake community, are doing in this time. This newsletter is filled with stories of care, support, love, and sharing God’s grace with those who need support and thanking those who are making a difference. We know Silver Lake changes lives. We also know that transformation finds its way into the wider world through Silver Lakers who change lives.

I also want to make sure you know how incredible your year-round staff team is. I want to lift up a couple of celebrations. Summer 2021 is going to look like nothing before at Silver Lake, and this is the second new summer program your team has developed in two years. The staff has been in the midst of significant transition with a new Administrator, Site Manager, and Retreat & Finance Manager all within the last 17 months.

Amidst all this change, Silver Lake has faithfully journeyed through the health pandemic, working diligently to increase communication with our families, alumni, and wider community. We have tried to let you know that we are walking alongside you, committed to justice and showing God’s love to all we meet.

Finally, I want to acknowledge that this has been a difficult year for most all of us. And I am really excited for what is to come. Our young people need Silver Lake more than ever. They need a place to safely be in community, to be outside and unplugged, to play and laugh, and to know they are loved by God just the way they are. And to finally get out of their house and step away to camp to be refreshed, renewed, and grounded.

What I am most excited about is that our two-week sessions will give campers more of everything: more ropes, worship, fun, arts and crafts, swimming and boating, friendships, love, and faith.

For our retreat groups, we know that the need to safely gather and reestablish community is vital to their programs. Silver Lake can be that place of revitalization and growth. We also can be that place of connection for our families on retreat, another example of how we have adapted our ministry during Covid.

Thank you for all your support of this life-changing ministry We look forward to welcoming you back!

Blessings,
Rev. Ryan Gackenheimer
Executive Director

Campers Helping out in Their Local Communities

Continued From Page 1

helping. Now I help our church supper crew by running meals to peoples’ cars.”
Megan said that her work makes a difference because she is helping out people who are in need of food and that it is extra important this year.

“I also think seeing a young person helping the community makes people happy,” she said.

Another Silver Laker has found a very different way to help. Caleb May of Lakeville took his interest in birdwatching and turned it into a pandemic-safe activity for his entire community.

“Although this year took a lot away from me, it also gave me a lot of free time,” wrote Caleb. “I decided to put more attention into my interest in birding. It filled me with joy, and with the help of my mother, I decided to bring the joy of birding to others.”

Caleb began to write a weekly birding blog for Noble Horizons, a retirement community in Salisbury, CT. He also wrote articles for Main Street Magazine and gave an hour-long Zoom presentation through the Scoville Memorial Library in the fall. He has continued his work in the spring, writing about the spring migration and recording another presentation.

“I have loved every second of what I’ve done,” Caleb said. “I thoroughly enjoy sharing my love with other people in the hopes they discover the same joy I felt.”
Do you have a story of a camper helping out this year? Send it to slcc@silverlakect.org and we will feature it on our Facebook page.

Megan Millbauer runs meals to cars to help out at her New Hampshire church’s community dinners.

Silver Lake Award Nominations
Know someone who really embodies the spirit of Silver Lake?
Nominate them for the Silver Lake Award!
www.silverlakect.org/silverlakeaward
Lakers Share Mission Trip Memories

By Rev. Karl Duetzmann, Alumni Chaplain/Historian/Archivist

Mission work is another thread woven into the history of Silver Lake as we remember it. I posted on the Silver Lake Conference Center Alumni group on Facebook looking for memories from folks who had taken part in CT Conference mission trips. I received a FLOOD of replies filled with fond memories. I want to thank everyone who responded.

The song written by Tim Hughes and Bob Smith may sing about “The Road You Came In On,” but the ministry has always included an emphasis on mission that traveled back out that road. Building on the work of the Rev. Deane Hodges and the Rev. Ken Taylor and nurtured by Alden and Ruth Tyrol, mission-oriented connections outside the Lake developed over decades.

The first were trips for high school youth to sites in Puerto Rico like Ryder Memorial Children’s Hospital, established by the UCC in Humacao, and Deborah Home, an orphanage in Rio Piedras. There were also trips to St. Vincent’s Home for Handicapped Children, Port-au-Prince, Haiti, to Jamaica and more. They centered on outreach to those living in the poorest conditions.

The connection to Deborah Home became the strongest and lasted from the 1960s to the 1990s. Several young men from Deborah Home served on summer staff in 1967 and in the 1970s. Among them was Alberto Lugo, who has kept involved with Silver Lake by bringing young men from his church in New York City to work at Action Weekend.

In 1971, a youth group connected to the Episcopal Seminary in Carolina came to Silver Lake and shared in the construction of the Cedars.

A common theme in the memories was how life-changing they were. Nancy Jennings wrote:

“I was lucky enough to visit Deborah Home in 1982 and Ryder Memorial Hospital in 1983. They were two totally different experiences that helped shape who I am today.

“At Deborah Home, we built chicken coops, sorted donated clothes, played Uno (which the Spanish-speaking kids called ONE), and spent hours at a time playing with the kids on that amazing swing!”

“My expectation of Deborah Home was of an orphanage filled with sad, depressed children. Wow, was I wrong! It was truly a place filled with love, positive outlooks, and amazing spirit. I find myself drifting back in time whenever I’m feeling down. Years later, a song or a memory will take me back to that Deborah Home playground and it immediately makes me feel better!”

Rev. Jennifer Gingras wrote that her journey began in 1986, at the age of 16.

“I participated in a trip to Puerto Rico. The group was large, and we were separated into smaller teams disbursed throughout the island. Mine went to Seminario Evangélico de Puerto Rico. We worked in refreshing buildings and structures with a new coat of paint, but the real learning came when we heard accounts of what colonialism had wrought to the people who live there.

“Now, as an ordained clergyperson, I’ve co-lead adult mission trips to Oaxaca, Mexico, and South Dakota with Simply Smiles, and to H.O.M.E. in Orland, Maine. It has been a blessing to see the transformation that people go through when they learn about systemic poverty first-hand. Not as the ‘white saviors’ we may imagine ourselves to be, but as partners with children of God who deserve justice, compassion and to be heard.”

This article would not be complete without noting the Hammer & a Nail summer conference in Orland, ME. Since 1993, Rev. Susie and Brad Craig have lead a summer trip with young adults to support H.O.M.E. Inc.’s work with low-income and homeless families in rural Hancock County.

Rev. Sue Latourette shared: “Brad and Susie opened our eyes to the reality that even in Maine, which many people think of as a vacation destination, there could be one of the poorest counties in the U.S. It was always a wonderful blend of learning about the local area, appreciating the sites Maine offers, working side by side with the people of H.O.M.E., and understanding the underlying problems that lead to poor nutrition and many other personal health issues.”

These reflections and others I collected but didn’t have room to share here prove that one thing is for certain: The “road we came in on” has had a lot of traffic in mission undertaken and lives changed!

Tee Time

Come join a day of fun and competition while benefiting Silver Lake! Reconnect with old friends, alums, and staff! Introduce friends to Silver Lake by creating your own 4-some!

The annual Golf Tournament will kick off with a shotgun start at 9 a.m. on Sept. 21 at The Country Club of Waterbury, with lunch and reception following. Awards include a new set of golf clubs for the 1st hole-in-one!

Golfers and sponsors register online for this year’s event at www.silverlakect.org/golf.

Entry fee is $220 per person. Sponsorships range from contest sponsor to tee markers to hosting.
Alums Powering Connecticut’s Vaccine Villages

Continued From Page 1

villages” at Rentschler Field in East Hartford, Stamford, The Danbury Fair Mall, and Wesleyan University in Middletown.

Getting the vaccine centers up and running required speed, cooperation, and creativity. Their first site was Rentschler Field, essentially a vacant lot with no electricity. They had only four days to design and build a vaccine village with 600 amp power, specialized equipment, and redundant generators.

“One Thursday I was standing on the tarmac with nothing there,” Ken said. “By Sunday night we had the thing powered up, lit up, and ready for vaccines on Monday.”

The sites in Danbury, Middletown, and Stamford were a little easier (they had off-street power), but all of them had unique challenges and all of them were built on quick deadlines. The Griffins were able to use long-standing relationships with companies in the electrical supply business to get equipment to the projects on tight turnarounds.

The Griffin Electrical staff was up for the historic challenge.

“It brought our guys together,” Ken said. “They jumped to it. If it was Saturday, Sunday, rain, snow. It united our staff to get these places up and running.”

Sean, Ken, and a third partner started Griffin Electrical Contractors in 1997 with, as Sean says, “a van and a credit card!” The company has grown leaps and bounds over the years, to 75 employees (and still hiring) and several major projects completed. Griffin Electric’s work includes Hartford Tower, Cigna, Seabury, and Sikorsky.

The Griffins say Silver Lake is foundational to their success. Ken recalls learning a work ethic on Camp Family, making sure dishes and freds were “Spanky clean” for a perfect health inspection score. “We strive for that today. To make sure everything is done right and correctly.”

Sean’s experiences working in community at Silver Lake gave him valuable human resources skills for his professional life.

“Building teams and working together with other people. You go to camp and you’re working with people you’ve never met before, and you have to work with dynamics of people’s personalities,” he said. “That’s pretty much what we do now on a daily basis. We build teams and have people work together that can work together.”

Of course, the Griffins have fond memories of early morning stretching and mentoring from Camp Family Dad, Bryan Breault, mowing straight lines for Alden, and walks up and down the hill morning, noon, night!

When you get your Covid vaccine shot, look for the Griffin Electric sign and sing a Silver Lake song as you wait your 15 minutes! You can learn more about Griffin Electrical Contractors at www.griffinelectricalinc.com.

Silver Lake 2020 Golf Tournament

Thank you to all who made the 2020 Golf Tournament our best year yet, raising more than $15,000. We would especially like to thank our sponsors and underwriters.

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Upcoming Events at Silver Lake

You’re Invited! We would love you to join in our events and activities! Call (860) 364-5526 or email slcc@silverlakect.org for more information. To register online or for details, go to www.silverlakect.org/events.

June 27 Session 1: Down & Dirty
July 11 Session 2: Water World
July 25 Session 3: Just Camp
Sept. 21 Silver Lake Golf Tournament. The Country Club of Waterbury; register online.
Oct. 3 Silver Lake Award. Tickets available online.
Nov. 5-7 Pride Retreat. For LGBTQIA+ campers and allies. Register online.
Nov. 19-21 Fall Action. Register online; adults, RSVP by email to slcc@silverlakect.org.
Dec. 4 Christmas at the Lake Family Day. Register online.
Dec. 10-12 Christmas at the Lake. 4th, 5th & 6th grade; 7th & 8th grade. Register online.

Our Mission

Silver Lake Conference Center, a year-round outdoor ministry of the Southern New England Conference of the United Church of Christ, is called to covenant with God and with the churches and people of the Conference in the work of forming life-sustaining leaders for the church and the world, by offering to all:

- Experiences of inclusive and nurturing Christian community
- Opportunities to grow and participate as Christ’s disciples
- A model of sustainable environmental stewardship of God’s world.

We worship, learn, play, serve, and work together, respecting the right of private judgement. We seek to provide a safe environment of acceptance regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, or sexual orientation, reflecting our unity in Christ and respecting the faith journeys of all of God’s children.

“Welcome one another, therefore, as Christ has welcomed you, for the Glory of God.” Romans 15:7