

Area Boy Scout Camp Celebrates Birthday

By PAT HOLCOMBE

MAYVILLE — Camp Merz, the Mayville landmark and popular Boy Scout Camp, celebrated 70 years of existence Thursday with an open house, refreshments and tour.

Jim Butterfield, grandson of the camp's namesake, Frank Merz, who provided the funding for the camp in 1933, was on hand for the festivities that included a celebration of Merz' birthday, July 26.

Butterfield, a Jamestown native who now lives in Maryland, said his grandfather, who died in 1939, would be proud of the camp's achievements.

"He would be totally in favor of it," Butterfield said. "This is such a worthwhile endeavor. To think of the thousands of boys who have been helped over these 70 years, is just amazing. They've had positive experiences on this site because of the man who gave the money to establish it."

"There are 360 acres here and I know I speak for my family when I say that we want every square inch of it to remain devoted to the Boy Scouts and their activities. We think the (Boy Scout) council has done an excellent job of keeping it for the boys now and in the future."

Senior District Executive Mike Cldor and Camp Director Chris Sorenson said the traditional birthday celebration is a time for old and new Scouts to get together.

"We have a lot to celebrate," Cldor said. "We have a brand new shooting complex and a few remodeling projects going on. We have six new roofs going on six of our buildings and we plan to build a new BB gun range next year."

"This camp is awesome," said Scout Sam McNitt, 15, of Panama. He and twin brother, Howard, manned the refreshment table and

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— Jeff Shriver, camp employee

talked about their goals to continue with the Scouts as staffers next year while working on merit badges and other incentives offered.

"My whole scouting career has been here," Sam said. "They have different programs each year."

One boy said his goal is to be a waterfront director.

"It's one of the hardest areas. You help with the swimmers and teach for merit badges. You have to be a lifeguard and know how to operate the equipment."

The other twin said he wants to be the Nimawannachin, or "one who begins a great journey." This position, he said, teaches Boy Scouts the basic skills of Scouting. Jeff Shriver, they said, was in that position when they were recruited to Scouting.

"He is a nice guy. Very helpful and has a great sense of humor. He was a great role model for us," Sam said.

Shriver said the boys "are like my little brothers."

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For the eight weeks of their summer camp

at Merz, the boys said it was "like a secondary home." Their father, they said, also advised that "it looks great on a resume."

Troop Leader Andy Caesar said the McNitt boys "have achieved the 'Order of the Arrow' — the elite of Scouting. They have been elected by the other boys in their troop to hold that title. It's quite an honor," he said.

Boys who join Scouting, he said, come to have a lot of fun. They learn survival techniques, of course, but also learn a lot about self esteem and achievements. We have boating, archery and just about anything else you can think of."

There's also plenty of pranks and laughs. The Scout leader said he is constantly trying to think of ways to "get one over on the boys." Recently, he served rolled flank steak and told them it was elephant.

"I told them I was able to buy it over the Internet at wildeats.com — and wasn't that a lucky break."

Future plans include several of the troop's Scouts going to New Mexico for two weeks with 23 other boys from other troops in the council.

"Our troop has a great group of boys. We're very active and go camping once a month. We have great participation and spirit. I wish more boys would take advantage of it. Anytime you can drive or climb something, you know boys will love it," Caesar said.

"To have this facility and to see the Scouts — old and new — getting together to celebrate 70 years of the camp, is a wonderful thing. The good that it does for the boys who participate in Scouting may not even be realized until they're grown up. It teaches boys how to be better people and how to be good men. You can't put a price on that," he said.