

The History of Camp Dixie

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Birth of a Youth Camp

In the mid-1940's, Rev. GW Shepherd, an Advent Christian pastor in the Wilmington area, started the Community Advent Christian Church at Ogden, North Carolina (*now known as Living Water*). Shepherd was a man of vision, planting 10 churches during his ministry, and he proposed that the Advent Christian Conference of Eastern NC establish a campground on a property adjacent to the Community Advent Christian Church. Other Advent Christian Conferences had established campgrounds as a means of reaching out to the young people in their churches.

By **1948**, the Conference had established a Camp Ground Committee, establishing the very first site which they voted to name Camp Dixie at the Ogden location, "until such a time as the Conference decides to secure a more suitable place." Ten WWII military tents were purchased for use that first year.

Between **1949 and 1963**, Camp Dixie added a masonry block structure for use as a Girls Dormitory, a dining room and kitchen facility, and a Tabernacle. The youth programs held during the summer months were growing, and in 1955 they reported 102 campers in attendance representing 19 AC Churches from ENC. The growing attendance at Camp Dixie created a need for larger dorms, increased kitchen facilities, and improvements to the Tabernacle. During the early 50's the camp was seen as a project under the ENC Conference Home Mission Board.

The Conference added the five member Camp Ground Board in **1957** to their Constitution with the following purpose: *"to organize and plan the camp program, to raise money to promote the camp, to promote the camp and to have general supervision over the camp ground."*

In **1965**, the Board began investigating the possibility and feasibility of selling the Ogden campsite. The very next year, they began looking into the property at Page's Lake near Fayetteville. *"This is a section of land of about 117 acres, it has a large brick building, a brick house and several cottage-type cabins and a fine swimming area on the lake. The land would meet the needs of our Conference for many years and could be developed into a fine family camp as well as a Youth Camp."*

Relocation to Page's Lake

The new campground (*our current site*) with 119 acres and a 35-acre lake was purchased in January of **1967** and the old campground in Ogden was sold. Articles of Incorporation were drawn up for Camp Dixie and the size of the Camp Dixie Board increased to 15 members.

From 1967 -1983, the camp employed caretakers to live on site at the camp. In 1969, the Rev. Donald Lawson was the first to serve in the combined position of Camp Director and Field Director, the expense of which was shared by the Camp and Conference. Lawson was followed in 1978 by Rev. I. Clyde Shepherd as Camp Manager and Promotional Director.

Two long brick dorms (*now called the Nile and Family Units*) were built in 1969-71. They also cleared a lot of land and paved the parking area that year.

The first Harvest Day was held in **1970**, bringing in \$6,452.00. By **1972**, the Harvest Day receipts came close to \$11,000.00. There was a lot of support for the ministry at Camp Dixie among the Conference churches. The camp report in 1972 stated that, *"the most important thing that has happened at Camp Dixie this year is that some 100 young people have found the Lord as their Savior."*

In the early 70's, there were extensive repairs made to the existing structures on the property including the main building, the dam and spillway. Signs were put up on Highway 87. The improvements were made possible through the support of individuals and auxiliary groups in the Conference.

A Living Memorial Fund was established in **1973** to which donations could be made in memory of loved ones.

The Holland Gym was built in **1974** made possible by generous donations by Mr. & Mrs. W.A. Holland and J.P. Riddle. The summer camp weeks increased to three sessions: Junior, Intermediate and Senior. The Harvest Day totals for 1974 grew to over \$26,000.00, enabling the Board to pay off the initial indebtedness of Camp Dixie.

The first Counselor-in-Training (CIT) program was held in **1978** to prepare high school students for future leadership roles. The brochure for Camp Dixie in 1978 featured the slogan "Where Heaven and Earth Meet".

Improvements to the property in the late 70's included putting the finishing touches to the gym floor, installing heat in the dorms and dining room, and new cabinets in the kitchen. With all the growth the camp was experiencing, the Board voted in **1979** to pursue the idea of hiring someone to serve as Camp Director, Camp Manager and Youth Director for the ENC Conference.

Rev. Bobby Hiott was hired in **1980**, serving for 3 years as ENC Youth Director and Camp Manager. Hiott lived in Four Oaks using an office in the ENC Conference building. The camp continued to have a caretaker living on site at Camp Dixie.

Expansion of the Site

In **1983**, the camp sold and moved the old red buildings in order to make room for the construction of a pool. Grading was done for recreational fields - softball & soccer/football - and in April that year work began on the construction of the pool, which was completed in time for summer camp. The camp purchased some additional land that spring including a local Community Building now used as staff housing for summer staff.

The Board decided to combine the position of onsite caretaker with the position of Camp Director and ENC Youth Director with the hiring of Rev. Tony Jernigan in August of **1983**. Tony and Lana Jernigan moved into the brick home in the middle of camp. Tony served as Director, planned Conference Youth activities, and took charge of the upkeep of the camp. Lana served as bookkeeper and secretary for the camp and oversaw all aspects of foodservice.

Over the next decade, the camp underwent a lot of physical growth under the direction of Tony Jernigan and the Board of Directors. The camp was promoted to outside groups for rental and weekends began to fill up. A ministry team began travelling to the ENC Conference churches through the Spring to share Christ and recruit campers. Some of the highlights during this time were:

- **1985** The Community Building was remodeled into two family units. Air-conditioning was installed in the chapel. New shingles were put on the dining hall roof. The Jernigans sought training and made important connections annually through attending the Christian Camp and Conference Center Conventions.
- **1986** Goal posts were added to the soccer/football field. An outside ramp was built to the chapel.
- **1987** Camp Dixie worked with a graduate student at NC State to develop a long-range plan.
- **1988** A new area of the property on the other side of the lake was developed, constructing two new dorms that would each house 36, (*Mt. Hermon, Mt. Carmel*) and a meeting/kitchen area (*Mt. Zion*). The camp purchased an additional 20 acres on the other side of Bladen Union Church Road.
- **1989** A new floor was installed in the gym to address the problem of condensation on the floor. The project was funded through donations and a matching grant from the Florence Rogers Charitable Trust.

- **1990** Two new dorms were constructed on the Lakeside area (*Jordan and Galilee.*) New bathrooms were added to the back of all the Nile Units. The old bathrooms were turned into storage areas.
- **1991** Neal & Tracy Flewelling were hired to work alongside Tony & Lana. Neal as Assistant Director and Tracy as part-time secretary. The camp constructed a new residence for the Camp Director near the entrance to camp.
- **1992** The camp added a deferred giving program. Bumper Boats and Go-Carts were purchased from a site in Dunn that was going out of business. A go-cart track was built on the property.

Growing Through Adversity

In the fall of **1993**, we broke ground for a much needed meeting facility (*the Educational Building*) with five meeting rooms and laundry facilities.

Tragedy struck a month later when on November 17th, Camp Director Tony Jernigan died while doing underwater repair work on the camp dam. At the Board's request, Lana Jernigan served for a couple of years in the role of Administrative Director with Neal Flewelling as Director of Operations.

Before the end of 1993, the camp purchased the brick home beside the Guest Cottage, (*now used as housing for the Director of Maintenance*).

Over the next decade, the camp's infrastructure grew in order to meet the demands of the increased size and usage of the facility from the previous decade. The year round camp staff began to expand as well. We began using database software in **1994** and the Board appointed a Task Force to work alongside staff on general operations. An outdoor basketball and shuffleboard court was added. This area was later repurposed as the site for miniature golf.

The camp adopted the following formal mission statement in 1995, "*to promote the Gospel of Christ through evangelism and discipleship in quality summer camps for youth and retreat programs for all ages; and to provide a Christ-centered year-round conference center and retreat site.*"

The Durham AC Church donated their property to Camp Dixie in **1995**, tasking the Board with the oversight of its sale which was finally completed in **1997**. Upon the sale of the property, the camp fulfilled the desires of the former congregation in Durham by upgrading all facilities to make them wheelchair accessible, adding ramps to all the lodging areas, paving all the roadways and adding sidewalks. A scholarship fund was set up at that time for campers with special needs. The fund was later renamed the *Stacey Moore Scholarship Fund* in memory of our longtime treasurer who had a vision to see our camp programs expand to meet the needs of special populations of campers.

The camp built a beautiful outdoor lakeside chapel in **1998** in memory of Tony Jernigan. It is the perfect site for lakeside gatherings and devotionals and has become a favorite site for weddings at camp.

The late 90's were a time of frequent turnover in the executive staff at the camp. Each person brought unique strengths that God used to help further the growing ministry. Executive Directors who served during this time were:

- 1996 - Steve Nicholson
- 1997 - Clint Overby followed by Randy Parker
- 1999 - Dean Skinner

The camp continued to grow in the late 90's adding additional full-time maintenance staff, upgrading vehicles and machinery. The summer camp programs were growing as well, adding an additional session of camp to bring the total weeks to four.

From approximately 1985 to 1997, countless numbers of high school and college students served on our musical team *Impact* and *Puppets, Inc.* puppet team that travelled to Conference churches representing the camp through ministry programs. In 1998, the team reorganized and was renamed *The Camp Dixie Youth Ministry Team*. For the next 12 years, the group continued to travel, leading congregations in a time of creative worship.

In **1999**, we held our first Open House event as an orientation event for families considering summer camp. It was expanded in **2000** to a fun family event for the general public featuring free recreation. Each year since, we have set aside the first Sunday of May as *Open House / Family Fun Day*. It is the only day of the year we are open to the general public and attendance has risen some years to over 800.

Stability and Growth of Outreach

Ronnie LaFevers was hired as Executive Director in the Fall of **2001**, leading the camp into a decade of growth and stability. God often surprised us by giving us opportunities to take the ministry to places that went beyond the confines of our property.

A new office building was completed in **2002** providing much needed space for the growth the camp was experiencing. Air conditioning was added to the first floor of the main building that same year. Three phase power was brought onto the property as the camp considered further building projects. A giant waterslide was added to the pool.

To meet the ever-growing need of training counselors, we developed a Staff Training Manual in **2002** that is updated annually as needs and issues change. Since 2004, counseling staff are required

to attend an intensive 5-day training session prior to working at camp. Other teams of college students from around the US join us each June for a joint week of staff training that began in 2006.

A summer camp discount for campers who are regular attendees of Advent Christian Churches was first introduced in **2003**. Finding ourselves in a rich time of leadership development with our Summer Camp staff between 2003-2009, we trained and sent out **Summer Ministries Teams** of college students to serve for several weeks following our camps in Advent Christian camps and churches across the United States. Summer Ministries refocused in 2010 to provide leadership and staff for three years of missional outreach in Johnston County, working closely with local churches.

In **2004**, while considering further expansion, it became necessary to put in a new septic system for our main building with dining facilities in order to comply with state guidelines. The project was much larger than what we had anticipated forcing us to temporarily set aside any plans for future building. The *“One Foot In Front of the Other”* campaign brought in a lot of donations towards the project, one foot of pipe at a time. The project was completed in **2006**.

Also in 2006, a marked system of walking trails was added to both ends of the camp following the upper treeline and making its way to the hilltop camping area at Mt. Nebo. The pool received major renovations that year. The Chapel roof was replaced. Brick baseball dugouts were added to the ball field that year in memory of Christopher Stancil. Heavy rains that year washed out the road to the hilltop requiring major reconstruction and new culverts.

The ministry of camp continued to go beyond our boundaries in the fall of 2006 with the birth of Project SaM when a group of our CIT's asked us to continue discipling them throughout the year. Since 2006, hundreds of high school students have been paired with an adult mentor, gone through three levels of biblical and leadership courses, and graduated from the program. Many of the graduates return to serve as mentors in the program.

Due to summer camp attendance overflowing, creating waiting lists for several weeks of camp, new additions were added to the back of the Nile dorms in **2007** resulting in increased capacity of 72 additional beds. In the fall of 2007, major improvements were made to the masonry dam including the construction of a walkway that is ADA compliant. The shelter over the dam was rebuilt and completed in January of 2008.

In July of 2007, the State put regulations in place that resulted in the temporary shut down of the waterslide and go-cart track. We were able to come into compliance with the waterslide very quickly. The maintenance crew spent the month of August renovating the go-cart track in the hottest August on record, reopening it in September.

A growing number of families from outside our ENC Conference needed financial assistance in order to send their campers to camp. The scholarship needs were met through individual donations for

several years. The board voted in **2008** that funds raised from the Tony Jernigan Memorial Golf Tournament, started in 1996, would be used for Camp Scholarships.

Battling Viruses and Hurricanes

In the summer of **2009** with camper attendance at its highest on record, in spite of camper screening procedures, we were hit by the H1N1 virus during our second session of Kids' Camp. The third session of camp had to be cancelled and full refunds given, dealing a difficult financial blow to the camp. It took almost eight years for the camp to see camp attendance begin to rebound.

Through careful planning and budgeting, the camp continued to make improvements and upgrade the facilities:

- 2010 A new roof was put on the dining hall
- 2012 The gym roof was replaced with a metal roof
 - The deck was replaced on Mt. Carmel
- 2013 AED defibrillators were added.
- 2014 A new deck was built on the Educational Building

In an effort to reach out to the military population, the Board added military discounts to our pricing structure for summer camps and rentals in **2012**.

The camp held a successful 5K Family Fun Run in Fayetteville in the spring of **2014**. In response to the requests of camper families, we held our first Family Camp Weekend over Labor Day Weekend that year.

We moved our Summer Camp registration to a web-based registration system in the fall of **2015**, making the entire registration process more user friendly and lessening the amount of data entry in our office.

The camp went through a branding process in **2016** involving the board, staff, camp families and guest groups in looking at critical aspects of our ministry. During the process of looking at what we were doing well as a ministry, we frequently heard people say they had experienced growth in two key areas: faith and community. Clint Overby developed a beautiful color logo to reflect the new brand: *"Where Faith and Community Grow"*. Campers enjoyed the addition of a Gaga Pit, a game played in an eight-sided court that summer.

On October 8, **2016** Camp Dixie found itself in the path of Hurricane Matthew on what was supposed to be our annual Harvest Day. The waterfront BLOB area was destroyed, breaching the earthen portion of our dam. The road to the hilltop lodging area was washed away. During the height of the storm, 12 inches of water flooded the first floor of the Main Building. Water also seeped into the

back of several of the Nile Units and hotel rooms. Harvest Day was rescheduled a couple weeks later and camp saw an outpouring of support with gifts coming in that far surpassed any amounts we could have foreseen. We entered a period of fundraising and rebuilding to Restore the Waterfront.

By February of **2017**, through the work of Danny Tew Construction working closely with our Director of Maintenance Brian Woody and his staff, we were able to reopen the hilltop for use by guest groups. We met our goal of reopening the waterfront in time for Open House on the first Sunday of May. By the opening of summer camp in mid-June, the area was beautifully landscaped with turf donated by Tri-State Turf. Our Summer Camp attendance grew by 12% in 2017 - the first significant growth in eight years.

To Support the Church

From our birth in 1947 up to the date of this writing in 2017, Camp Dixie has existed as a ministry of the Advent Christian Conference of Eastern North Carolina. This ministry exemplifies what can happen when people with a shared vision come together in community to accomplish together what they could not accomplish alone. The camp is strengthened by the support of the Conference and Conference churches are strengthened as a result of the camp ministry.

In addition to our Conference Churches, the camp continues to play an important role in supporting church and parachurch ministries as thousands of people from a variety of denominational and ethnic backgrounds hold their own camps and weekend retreats at our site each year.

The Unsung Heroes of the Story

It would take volumes to list the names of all those who have played significant roles in the development of Camp Dixie. So many people from our Conference have given faithful service and leadership as a member of the **Camp Dixie Board of Directors**, some for decades.

The camp has been blessed with so many gifted individuals who have served on our **Full-time Year-round Staff**, choosing to use areas of expertise in service to God through this ministry. Whether working in the office, cooking meals, registering campers, replacing shingles, planning events, plunging toilets, cleaning lodging, mowing grass, or rebuilding a waterfront, their hard work and dedication to serving with excellence is a testimony to their love for God. While their names are not recorded in this history, each person is deserving of their own chapters in this story!

Each summer we employ a dedicated **Summer Staff** of students who work behind the scenes in the kitchen, store, and recreation going the extra mile to give great service to our guest groups. They are so often the face of this ministry to our guest groups.

Then there are those who've directly impacted the lives of thousands of our campers over the years by serving during the summer months as members of the **Summer Camp Staff** as Counselors, Teachers, Nurses, Directors, Program Staff, and CIT's. We cannot begin to express our thankfulness for your partnership in the gospel. We stand with you in trusting God to complete what he started in the lives of each child you served.

There are many exciting chapters waiting to be written in the story of Camp Dixie. Our story is part of His Story! May Camp Dixie continue to be a place where people of all ages can come into relationship with God through Christ, mature in their faith, and find a deeper sense of community with others.

To view a video presentation of this history, go to www.campdixie.com and look for the Our History tab under About Us.