

Quest's News

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Camperships Create Lasting Memories

At Quest's Camp Thunderbird, Linda is known as one of the happiest campers. Her ever-present smile radiates warmth and enthusiasm for life.

"It is always a pleasure to see Linda's smiling face on opening day because she's so excited to see her friends and the camp family," said Melanie Withington, a summer manager at Camp Thunderbird. "It almost seems like she has come home."

Her Favorite Place

After attending camp for the last six years, Linda, 39, calls Camp Thunderbird her favorite place. There she gets a real summer camp experience that can accommodate her special needs. She has the most fun participating in music and dance, especially at her end-of-summer talent show performance, but camp has also helped her to become more outgoing and make friends.

"She absolutely loves camp," said Gloria, Linda's sister. "She looks forward to it every year. She gets to mingle with people there, which she doesn't always get to do."

Financial Challenges

Until recently, Linda lived in Central Florida with Gloria. She had a steady job and always set aside money from her earnings to pay for a portion of her own camp fees – a big help for her family. But when she moved to Georgia last year to live with her mother, she had to leave her job behind, meaning she could no longer afford to pay for camp.

Such financial challenges are not uncommon. Many families who have a member with a disability face overwhelming expenses and struggle to pay for even the bare essentials, and funds for activities like camp can be out of the question. Without any other means to fund it, Linda's family feared she would have to spend a summer away from her favorite place.

"It would have broken her heart if she couldn't go," Gloria said. "She kept praying that she'd find a way."



Six-year veteran camper Linda enjoys rock climbing at Quest's Camp Thunderbird. Nearly 400 campers attend each summer, many of whom rely on Quest and the financial support from the community to afford camp.

A Campership Granted Linda's Wish

Linda did find a way to attend camp this past summer, thanks to the generosity of people like you. Your support enabled Quest to offer Linda a "campership" scholarship. Without those funds, Linda and many of the nearly 400 campers that Quest serves each year would not have been able to make camp a reality.

But because of you, Linda was able to join her friends at Camp Thunderbird, and to participate in all of camp's fun activities. And though she is working on getting Linda back to camp for this year's season, Gloria is appreciative that her younger sister was able to attend last summer.

"I think it's wonderful, especially with the economy the way it is, that people out there care and help out those less fortunate. And I think it's wonderful that Linda could still come back."

From the president

Your support made 2009 a great year for Quest. We completed our first semesters at QuestKids Academy and managing the Florida Autism Center for Excellence (FACE) – both of which were initiated in response to Florida’s escalating population of children with autism. We opened a new group home in Tampa, which will provide a real home for more people with disabilities, rather than just a place to live. We had a full house during Camp Thunderbird’s 40th anniversary this summer, in part because of the camperships we were able to provide for low-income campers through gifts like yours.

Quest was even recognized with several awards because of our commitment to empowering people with disabilities, including a Beacon Award for embracing workforce diversity and a \$75,000 grant award from **The Galloway Foundation** to name the first of four classrooms at QuestKids Academy.

These achievements were realized because of your support. Together, we were able to change lives for the better each day last year by helping people to achieve their dreams and reach their goals. While 2010 will bring new challenges, your generosity fills me with the hope that we will meet them and continue to celebrate new successes this year.

Katie

Perseverance Pays Off



Jessica greets guests at the Journey to Atlantis ride at SeaWorld Orlando. She is a seasonal employee but is working on becoming part-time there soon. “I have fun at SeaWorld, and I can’t wait to go back,” she said.

SeaWorld Orlando employee Jessica remembers exactly what she purchased with her first real paycheck.

“I bought some shoes, some shirts for my brother, three bags and some cotton candy,” she said.

At SeaWorld, Jessica, 23, works as a seasonal employee at the Journey to Atlantis ride. She loves her role so much, she can explain every detail of her job duties with ease and has a warm confidence about her. It’s hard to believe she wasn’t always that way.

Challenged with a language and learning disability, Jessica first arrived at Quest after completing high school. She was extremely shy and wasn’t yet ready for higher education or unsupported employment, but her father, Robert, thought Quest could gradually lead her to her goal of securing a job.

“She needed the opportunity to work,” he said. “Just because she has a disability, I don’t think it should hinder her.”

Jessica started her journey inside QuestWorks vocational center and immediately excelled. Soon after, she decided that she was ready to work out in the community and graduated to QuestWorks’ supported employment program.

With the help of a job coach, Jessica worked on everything from the job application to interview skills, which helped her make it through her SeaWorld interview and initial screening. Everything was falling into place until she hit her first major hurdle: she would have to pass a complicated test before being offered the job. Despite her challenges, her determination was unwavering.

“I had that feeling that I was going to pass because I wanted the job,” Jessica said. “I didn’t want to let myself down.”

She spent all of her free time for the next few weeks studying with her job coach and family – and her dedication paid off. She passed her test, started working at SeaWorld and began earning a steady paycheck. Working has helped her become more outspoken and gain confidence – something that surprised her family – and Robert is hopeful of her future because of the help she received at Quest.

“When she came to Quest, everything changed,” he said. “Quest gave her an opportunity and opened up those doors for her, and she’s come a long way.”

Guest Article: “Why I’m Involved with Quest”



Beth Hobart is a Quest board member, donor and volunteer. Most recently, she participated in Quest’s Adopt a Home for the Holidays – a program where volunteers share the spirit of the holidays with Quest residents. Below she explains why she is involved with Quest.

Since I was little, my mother always taught me to come from a point of service. She would take me to nursing homes and soup kitchens to volunteer, and each year we would get involved in clothing drives and fundraisers in our community. It became a big part of my life and who I am. So in my past 14 years living in Orlando, I’ve found that it’s not only volunteering that I love, but also getting involved in the community in which I live.

I learned about Quest from my husband Jim (only, he wasn’t my husband at the time). After mentioning to him that I was looking for a volunteering opportunity, he set up a tour for me with Quest so I could learn more.

On the tour, I saw many types of disabilities: from severe cases where the individuals needed around-the-clock care, to those who were highly functioning and holding down a job thanks to Quest’s training programs. I saw people who just wanted to be like everyone else; who were not pitied, but told that they can accomplish things that most of us take for granted. It inspired me to get involved and become part of an organization that recognizes that all of us are capable of anything we desire for ourselves, if only given the opportunity.



Beth Hobart rallied together a group of friends and colleagues to coordinate her Adopt a Home for the Holidays celebration at Quest’s Greenwood Apartments.



Quest resident Elizabeth opens up a gift she received at Beth Hobart’s Adopt a Home for the Holidays party at Greenwood Apartments. Residents deemed this past holiday season their best one yet.

I started volunteering at Greenwood Apartments, a Quest home near Downtown Orlando. I would visit once a week to cook dinner with the residents there and go for walks or go on outings to basketball games or to the movies.

Eventually that evolved into the Adopt a Home for the Holidays program, which I still participate in to this day. I collect gifts, food and holiday decoration donations from friends and colleagues and throw a big holiday party at Greenwood. It provides each resident with gifts to open, a home decorated for the holidays and the chance to celebrate with the other residents and make new friends. Many of the residents don’t have families around, so if I can do something to make them feel special, that means the most to me... especially around the holidays.

I’ve been involved with Quest for about 10 years now. After speaking with the parents of children with disabilities, I realized that their biggest concern was that they will some day pass on and leave their children behind. They want to be sure that their children can take care of themselves when they are not there. Quest provides that training and support so the parents know that their children can take care of themselves and reach their full potential.

We are all capable of greatness. Quest takes the time to work through whatever challenge an individual is faced with, and provides them with the opportunity to help them achieve their goals... no matter what level of disability or stage of life.

Beth Hobart is a realtor at Keller Williams Advantage II Realty.

Quest Awarded \$200,000 by Bank of America

Quest is honored to have been named a 2009 Neighborhood Builder by the **Bank of America Charitable Foundation!** Quest is one of only two Central Florida nonprofits to receive this prestigious award and will receive a total of \$200,000 in unrestricted grant funding. Quest will also participate in Bank of America's Neighborhood Excellence Leadership Program with other nonprofit leaders from 45 communities across the country and London.

As a leader in the disability services field, Quest has helped children and adults with disabilities in Central Florida reach their goals for nearly 50 years through our variety of vocational, residential, recreational and children's programs. This award will create a lasting impact by allowing us to expand our efforts in assisting people with disabilities to increase their independence.



Quest president Katie Porta accepts the \$200,000 Neighborhood Builder award from John Moskos, Central Florida president of Bank of America.



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