



Ricky Campanella spreads grass seed around the new cabin at Cradle Beach Camp in Angola on Friday. The cabin is the second the Children's Guild Foundation has funded since 2001.

Adam Wolfbrandt /Buffalo News

Year-round Cradle Beach Camping

Camp plans to concentrate pilot team-building, literacy program in Lovejoy Discovery School

Kids are getting a taste of camp all year round, as Cradle Beach Camp plans to take a pilot youth development program hosted in four Buffalo schools this year and turn it into a more concentrated, permanent program when classes resume in the fall.

The program, which targets third-graders' literacy and creative thinking skills and works with them through the eighth grade, is taking strides to prove that Cradle Beach is "more than just a summer camp," said Tim Boling, chief executive officer of the camp, which also will debut a new cabin and garden this summer.

The pilot program worked with 36 students — nine in each school — this past academic year, both in the classroom and by bringing participating kids to Cradle Beach for a weekend once a month. It will continue with some of the same third-graders, as well as a whole new class — but not without a major change.

"We have an amazing site and an amazing summer program, and the needs of the community are so great relative to graduation rates for the kids," Boling said. "We looked back at it and decided that instead of having one staff person in four schools, we'd have all four staff people in one school to increase our impact."

The sole institution set to partner with Cradle Beach this fall: Buffalo's Lovejoy Discovery School 43, where 60 kids will team-build, problem-solve and participate in other activities related to academic improvement.

Boling said that in the 2011-12 academic year, 80 kids will participate, as a new class of 20 third-graders is taken on each year while the program continues to work with this year's third-graders as they advance year by year.

David Hills, principal of School 43, said third grade was a critical point for students to begin the program, calling it the time when students transition from basic literacy skills to using literacy for lifelong learning.

"The students involved have really taken to it," he said. "Out of this group of students, many of them had real difficulties in school and were displaying real alienated behaviors."

Using regular testing to measure academic improvement, Hills said, the program has kept the learning curve stable for the students in the program.

"It's pushed us, when Cradle Beach was interested in doing more, to say we have no question" about expanding the program, he said.

Hills and other school officials joined Cradle Beach on Thursday for its Celebrations of Legends. Boling said the event was initiated four years ago to recognize those involved with the camp throughout its history.

Among the honorees was the Children's Guild Foundation, which funded a new \$30,000 cabin still being completed on the camp's grounds in Angola. It's the second cabin and one of many projects — like the 10 to 20 yearly camp scholarships — the foundation has funded since it began financing capital projects in 2001, said Cathie Gura, foundation president. The foundation also has financed such items as a ropes course, a playground and the camp's wheelchair-accessible treehouse, Gura said.

"You name it, we're there somewhere," she said.

Boling said the new cabin will serve 12 children with special needs.

"Our special-needs population is growing quite a bit," he said. "We're getting a lot more kids with autism."

About 72 percent of campers served are at or below the poverty line, and Cradle Beach serves kids with 50 different special needs.

Greg Allen, whose family was also honored Thursday, has been a supervisor of "the Hill," the area of the camp serving children with more severe disabilities, for many summers since he started working at Cradle Beach as a counselor in 1976. A teacher at West Genesee High School in Camillus, Allen said his first time in a Hill cabin was among his biggest challenges, but still one of the things that kept him coming back.


"You had kids with severe disabilities, so they required actual personal care. You also had kids with lower mental capacities, so they required constant supervision. So, you're torn between all

these different things," Allen said. "It's just so interesting. There's more variety in one cabin than there is in classrooms."

Also ready when camp begins in the coming weeks will be a garden, which will yield produce that will be served for campers to eat.

Boling said it will be tended to by the camp's kids from disadvantaged neighborhoods.

"A lot of those kids tell us, "We could tell you exactly where to find the latest drug on the street, but we can't tell you where to get a fresh tomato," he said. "It just really shocks you, that they couldn't tell you where to find any fresh produce."




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Directions to Cradle Beach Camp:

From Buffalo:

Follow Route 5 west, over the skyway towards Cleveland and Erie. Continue on Route 5 for 16 miles until the intersection of Route 5 and Sturgeon Point Road. Take a right onto Sturgeon Point Road and take it to the four corners. Turn left onto Old Lakeshore Road and continue past Wendt Beach. Take the first right which is the continuation of Old Lakeshore Road. After 1 mile, you will see the driveway on the right.

GPS address: 8038 Old Lakeshore Road, Angola, NY 14006