

Remembering Ryan Condon

Love for summer camp and Notre Dame inspires two funds established through the CCF

Summer camp. One of those classic childhood experiences that conjures up memories of horseback riding, singing by the campfire, making new friends, and appreciating the beauty of nature. At Camp Rancho Framasa, found centrally within the Archdiocese of Indianapolis and located in the rolling hills of southern Indiana, Catholic youth have been talking about their camp experience for almost 70 years.

Mixed in with the traditional camp “stuff”, young people at the Catholic Youth Organization (CYO) camp also benefit from daily prayer, Mass and an opportunity to listen to God’s voice. It’s a place that played an important part in the life of Ryan Condon. When he died 10 years ago, the family focused on what was good in Ryan’s life and what made him happy – Camp Rancho Framasa.

“His mom and dad remembered his time at Camp Rancho as being good and fun,” said Billie Bankoff, Ryan’s aunt. “His mom, Trish, even recalled the first time he came home from camp and she unpacked a suitcase that had never been opened. Ryan was having so much fun at camp, he never changed his clothes.”

Remembering the happy times was a good diversion in the weeks after Ryan’s death. But Bankoff and the family wanted to remember Ryan in a more permanent way, so they established the Ryan Patrick Condon CYO Campership Endowment Fund through the Catholic Community Foundation (CCF). Designed with the intent to send children to camp on scholarship that were financially unable to go, the fund was started with \$5,000 seed money. Scholarships were paid for through the interest earned.

“The first year, we were able to send one child to camp,” said Bankoff. “But we have been able to send more each successive year. At one point, we were able to send seven children in one summer, which is really, really special.”

Bankoff said people remember Ryan as a sunny, fun-loving guy. They wanted to celebrate those qualities by contributing to the endowment on a regular basis. Ryan’s family and friends helped grow the endowment by adding contributions on special occasions – Ryan’s birthday, the anniversary of his passing, other family members’ birthdays. The immediate family, Ryan’s friends, and even family friends got involved, Bankoff said.

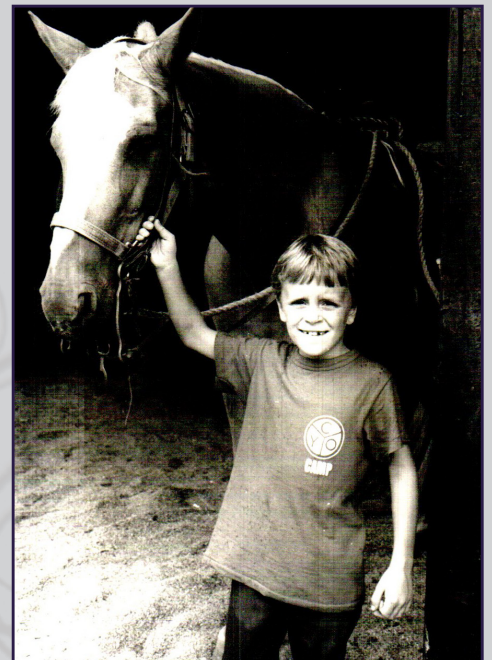
“That’s how a fund grows. People want to get involved – they want to help. Knowing that it will help other children have an experience they might not have in their life is just another great incentive,” she said. The scholarship endowment fund has grown from the initial \$5,000 to more than \$66,000 today.

“The CCF is just so good at what they do,” Bankoff added. “We’ve watched our endowment fund grow nicely over the last 10 years and never worried that if something happened in the economy, it would harm that main fund. We knew it was conservatively invested and they were watching and being careful with the investment. It was really carefree for us. We get quarterly reports and they are always very well done.”

Over the years, even in his absence, Ryan continues to make friends at Camp Rancho Framasa through the scholarships given to campers. Those campers have gotten to know Ryan in a very personal way, Bankoff said.

“Many summers we would get thank you notes from those campers and artwork that they made, saying thank you for allowing us to have this experience,” she said. “It feels good. It feels like even though we lost Ryan, we’re helping others in his name.”

Ryan’s father, Derry Condon, said providing other children the camp experience is a very meaningful way to remember his son. “We’re so pleased the scholarship fund is providing young people the opportunity to have the kind of camp experience that Ryan loved so much and looked forward to every year,” said Condon. “It’s such an appropriate way to remember him, and he would be so honored that his memory is living on in this way.”



Building Fund Established for Camp Grotto

With this year marking 10 years since Ryan's death, Bankoff and Ryan's parents, wanted to commemorate the anniversary by starting a new fund through the CCF that would support building a permanent structure at Camp Rancho Framasa. Derry, an Indianapolis architect, has designed many of the current buildings at camp and this was also a way he could be involved in designing something permanent through a tangible structure for his son.

Ed Tinder, executive director of the Catholic Youth Organization that Camp Rancho Framasa is a part of, came up with the idea of a grotto that emulates the Grotto of Our Lady of Lourdes at the University of Notre Dame. It was an idea fully embraced – Ryan was an avid Irish fan.

"Ryan was a huge Notre Dame fan," said Bankoff, a South Bend resident. "We talked about other ideas, but we just kept coming back to the grotto because of Ryan's love for Notre Dame, football and camp. It just seemed like a perfect fit."

Bankoff remembers Ryan calling every Sunday morning after a football game to go over the highlights. "I think Ryan would say those were some of the greatest times of his young life. He would be so pleased with what we are doing."

The site of the grotto will be where a current small grotto is located on the grounds of Camp Rancho Framasa. It is a smaller area that is in need of a facelift, but in a beautiful location, Bankoff said. The idea is to rebuild that grotto, make it bigger and better for everyone at camp to use – staff, parents, alumni, and campers. Bankoff said they want the grotto to be so special, it becomes a destination place at camp.

"We hope to imitate the grotto at Notre Dame, which has a very interesting history behind it and is also a destination location," Bankoff said. "It is so very special. So many stories that people have told of when they went to the Notre Dame grotto and came away with hope, or strength or courage. We felt like this could translate to Camp Rancho and we could do that there."

The Ryan Condon Building Fund Project was started this year with \$10,000 seed money. It is different from the scholarship endowment. Once it is determined how the grotto will look and its size, preliminary designs will be done and a building cost will be determined. Growing the fund based on the cost of the grotto will determine when construction begins.

"I don't know that we can use two-ton boulders like they did at Notre Dame, but wouldn't it be fun if some of the farmers from Brown County or the businesses or construction people from around the archdiocese had rocks or boulders they wanted to contribute?" said Bankoff. "The time it takes to get the grotto started and finished will depend on how quickly we can get the planning done and most importantly, grow the fund. But just the idea of being able to build a grotto at camp is exciting and we hope that other people will hear about it and think it's a great idea, too."

Bankoff is giving a shout out to all of the Notre Dame fans in the archdiocese – many, she presumes, have seen or experienced the grotto there for themselves and have also either personally experienced Camp Rancho Framasa or have taken their children there. They know the wonderful work that the CYO camp does for children, she said. And she hopes that will compel them to learn more about or contribute to the building fund project.

"This building fund is personally very important to me," Bankoff said. "Because there was nothing I could do to prevent Ryan's passing, this is something I can do now in the present that makes me feel good about how he lived and how we now live our lives in the family.

"It really does help the healing process when you can find ways to give back to others," she added. "It never takes away all of the hurt or the pain, but you know that we have that capability now to make a difference. We're always thinking about him."

Even after the grotto project is completed, the fund will continue to be a resource for Camp Rancho Framasa for ongoing projects and camp improvements. The hope is that the fund will be eternal and will continue to grow so that many generations to come will be able to enjoy the Camp Rancho Framasa experience.

"We have a vision, we have the desire and we know there is a need for a spiritual, meditative space like the grotto at Camp Rancho," Condon said. "So we are half way there. The other half will be met with the building fund that has been established in Ryan's name, and we know God will take care of the plan for getting it all done."

(For information on the Ryan Patrick Condon CYO Campership Endowment Fund, the Ryan Condon Building Fund Project or gifts that benefit Camp Rancho Framasa, contact the Catholic Community Foundation at (317) 236-1427 or (800) 382-9836, ext. 1427.)

