

Camp Soar's Perspective from the Inside

A camper's high five and another's "knuckle" greeting to Bob Bowler is usually the way the camp begins each year. Every year it is something Bob looks forward to and loves because all the campers greet him with excitement, hugs and "I love you."

It began with Bob Bowler. How much love can one person

give or have? Bob's vision, not only for Camp Soar but his commitment to so many other organizations is over whelming. If you know Bob Bowler, you are one lucky individual and his generosity and love is contagious.

By now Camp Soar should be in everyone's vocabulary because the LJCC has been hosting camp

for the past 15 years.

This five day, free retreat, was founded by Bob 15 years ago as a little dream. It hosted 50 campers for three days to participate in sporting activities.

Move forward to 2015, 360 campers and 400+ volunteers, add five days, and you'll have the current Camp Soar. "These campers

never cease to amaze; they participate in sports, extra-curricular activities such as bingo and arts and crafts, all while making new friends and reconnecting with old ones," Bowler said.

"I love doing the camp every year because it gives campers a chance to participate in a wonderful camping atmosphere that they may never had or will have. It is a life changing experience for them and a chance to build their self-esteem," Bowler said.

Bob continues explaining "these campers make new friends, try new sports, and adore working with their volunteers."

Like every year prior, no camper goes home empty handed and without wonderful and positive memories.

One camper's mother wrote Bob and said that her son "loved the activities, and I think he gave everything his all." She continues, "for him it wasn't about the activities that made the camp special for him, it was the people."

Apparently her son's motivation to get ready for Camp Soar was to practice his basketball skills prior to Camp Soar so "he could make Bob Bowler proud."

More campers' parents have said that not only was the camp wonderful, their campers said the enthusiasm of volunteers spread to everyone, and they loved how everyone interacted together.

The feedback from the many volunteers has been just as positive.

"I had a great time helping out at Camp Soar this year," Ashley Smith from Compass-Usa wrote. "It touches so many lives, and I am so thankful I got to be just a tiny part of it."

There were many repeat volunteers that came from all over. We even had one volunteer travel all the way from Tennessee just to be involved.

Kristin Venit said her son Austin had such an incredible week as a volunteer that he will never forget the experience. He hopes to return again next year.



Another special part of Camp Soar honoring Bob's late daughter, Vickie. It is important for him that we all remember how wonderful she was and, like Bob, remember how she inspired and motivated so many people she touched. "She always was reaching out to help people and she enjoyed enhancing their quality of life," Bob explained.

One way camp carries on Vickie's memory is to present the Vickie Bowler Memorial Award to a volunteer recognizing their extraordinary enthusiasm, energy, and commitment to the camp. This year's recipient was Diana Ades. Diana has been involved with Camp Soar since the beginning and is an integral part of Camp Soar's success.

The Compass Group/Canteen Vending sponsors this prestigious award.

A debt of gratitude is due to the generosity of Compass Group/Canteen Vending. They have fed the campers and volunteers from the beginning. They don't just supply the lunches but also provide the drinks and snacks to the increasing number of volunteers and campers each year.

Hopefully you now know a bit more about Camp Soar from the people who produce, volunteer, attend, and sponsor this wonderful free camp. Maybe you'll even want to get involved.

It changes the camper's lives, but trust us when we say it changes the lives of all that are involved.

Next year's camp will take place, June 13 - 17. To get involved with Camp Soar or for more information, please contact stephanie.garner@charlottejcc.org or 704-944-6743. ☆

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Having Fun at Camp Soar

