MARTHA WISE AWARD ENTRY - EXISTING PROJECT

CHAPTER NAME: Junior Auxiliary of Vicksburg
PO BOX 1488
Vicksburg, MS 39180

POPULATION CATEGORY: 15,000 to 29,999

NAME OF PROJECT: Camp Silvercloud

CATEGORY: (Check One) (A) _______ (B) ___X___

TOTAL HOURS OF SERVICE GIVEN BY MEMBERS: Over 500

ACTIVE MEMBERSHIP OF CHAPTER: 54

NUMBER OF MEMBERS PARTICIPATING: 15

PURPOSE OF PROJECT: Camp Silvercloud provides an overnight summer camp experience for children with special needs in Warren County.

COST OF PROJECT: $3,000

NUMBER OF PERSONS SERVED: 70 CAMPERS & HIGH SCHOOL COUNSELORS

Junior Auxiliary of Vicksburg - Camp Silvercloud

Someone once said about summer camp, “The amazing thing about camp is that it truly brings out the best in everyone, and you don’t feel like you have to change who you are.” This is especially true for kids who do not have the opportunity to experience such a thing due to a physical or mental disability. This year the Vicksburg chapter of Junior Auxiliary took our existing project Camp Silvercloud to the next level by turning a 3 day, day only camp into an overnight camping experience that was incredibly rewarding for everyone involved.

After discussing how we could improve upon such a successful project (sixteen years and counting), we finally decided that it was time to grow our project. Following our President’s challenge of making our chapter “bigger and better,” we decided to turn Camp Silvercloud into an overnight camping experience for our campers with special needs. We knew that there would be significant planning involved and many challenges that we would
face along the way, but with the support of the entire chapter, we dove right in. We immediately sought out help from our community and were overwhelmed with the support! The local YMCA donated the use of their camping facilities (Warner Tully YMCA Camp in Port Gibson, MS) and the camp directors volunteered to come facilitate various activities. A local group of women volunteered to cook, serve, and clean up each meal. High school students from local high schools volunteered to be counselors. Businesses donated items ranging from camping supplies to food. The ladies of our chapter (not just the ones on the project) chipped in to help in a variety of ways. It was so exciting to see everyone coming together to give the kids with special needs in our community an opportunity to enjoy summer camp.

When the project members met to start planning for Camp Silvercloud, we really made sure that each member had responsibilities both before and during camp. This helped ensure that everyone would feel vested in the project and help things run as smooth as possible. Some responsibilities included food planning, public relations, creating the parent brochure and applications, coordinating the applications with each high school to recruit counselors, coordinating the arts and crafts, ordering t-shirts and supplies, securing a life guard, and being the nurse on call. With everyone working toward a common goal, we were able to have a very successful camp! As a part of this planning, we knew that selecting the right group of high schoolers to be counselors would be critical given that we would now be spending the night away at camp. We sent the local high schools applications and designated a point of contact at each school. We made sure that the teenagers we selected were approved by a Junior Auxiliary member and had an outstanding application. This was so important because while at camp, each camper is assigned a counselor that stays with them throughout the day and night. This creates a unique bond where friendships turn into family. Year after year we hear back from the high school counselors that participating in Camp Silvercloud was one of the most rewarding experiences of their lives. The counselors who return each year ask to be partnered with the same camper. It is truly one of the best parts about Camp Silvercloud. Finalizing the list of counselors took some time, but in the end we
had a great group of attentive, wonderful high schoolers that made outstanding counselors. We also spent a significant amount of time making sure that our campers and their families fully understood camp this year since it was so different. We carefully looked at each application making sure that we felt they would be comfortable spending the night with us at camp. In the end, all campers were selected to participate: 32 total!

We began all this planning the moment the project placements were assigned to our members in April 2015 and worked non-stop until camp in July. The counselors checked in on a Sunday afternoon for training and a cookout, and campers arrived bright and early Monday morning. While at Camp Silvercloud, campers participated in a variety of activities: canoeing, archery, arts and crafts, dancing, swimming, and nature walking. They made s’mores by the camp fire and also had a talent show!

We spent two jam-packed, exhausting days at Camp Silvercloud, but boy was it worth it. All the months of planning were worth it once you could see the excitement and joy on the kids’ faces during those days. They all, campers and counselors, had an amazing camp experience, which validated our decision to make camp an overnight experience!! We received several letters of thanks in the weeks after camp and take great pride in knowing that we were able to make a difference in those kids’ lives. After all, that is what being a member of Junior Auxiliary is all about.....giving of our time and talents to make a difference in our community.

The future of Camp Silvercloud is very bright. This project plans on growing next year, allowing for more campers and counselors to enjoy this wonderful experience. We would also like to lengthen camp in the next few years.

Overall, this project is one of the best JAV has to offer. The community stands behind it, the members stand behind it, and the kids who are involved, both camper and counselor, have an experience like none else!! There’s nothing like summer camp, especially Camp Silvercloud!!!