Chapter Name
Junior Auxiliary of McComb, Mississippi

Submitted by Name and Email Address
Mallory Newlon mlnewlon@gmail.com

Address
1045 Turkey Ridge Road
Summit, MS
39666

Population Category
15,000 - 29,999

Name of Project
Camp Sunshine

Project Category
Outstanding Existing Project

Total Hours of Service Given by Members
2100

Active Membership of Chapter
46

Number of Members Participating
Purpose of Project
To give special-needs campers a traditional summer camp experience while providing their full-time caregivers a week of rest from their caregiving duties

Cost of Project
35000

Number of Persons Served
118

Narrative

Digital Photo
Camp-Sunshine-photo.JPG

Sent from National Association of Junior Auxiliaries, Inc.
Junior Auxiliary of McComb's Camp Sunshine is a week-long overnight summer camp for special needs children and adults living in Southwest Mississippi. It is designed to give special-needs campers a traditional camp experience while providing their full-time caregivers a week of rest from their caregiving duties.

Camp Sunshine began modestly forty-two years ago in 1976 when a small group of teachers, including McComb Public School administrator and special education teacher Becky Morgan, began looking for summertime activities for special-needs children in Pike County so that they did not have to be in a classroom or institutionalized year-round. When the ladies found the only two special-needs camps in the region to be without availability for their students, these women took it upon themselves to create their own camp for special needs children in the area. The first camp had only five counselors and fifteen campers. Only a few years after the camp's founding, the Junior Auxiliary of McComb adopted Camp Sunshine as its own major project, fully funding the camp and providing manpower to run the camp.

Since its inception, Camp Sunshine has steadily grown. The 2017 camp had one hundred eighteen campers (118), one hundred forty-three (143) high school and college counselors, twenty-five (25) adult staff, and over forty (40) day volunteers from the community. The whole Pike County community gets involved in Camp Sunshine including the local Girl Scouts, Boy Scouts, numerous civic organizations, businesses, and even law enforcement groups. The active, associate, and life members of JA also volunteer, doing everything from decorating, manning the activity stations, preparing and serving food, washing laundry, and cleaning cabins. Every Camp Sunshine volunteer is willing to do whatever it takes to provide a safe, fun experience for the precious campers.
Planning and preparing for Camp Sunshine is a major undertaking. The chairperson is appointed more than a year before “her” camp takes place. She first chooses a theme and a co-chair who will serve as the chairperson the following year. These two individuals spend several months organizing every detail of camp—the decorations, the activities, the special events, the meals, etc. After every detail of camp is planned, the JA membership is divided into committees in order to make the chairperson’s vision come to life! JA members volunteer hundreds of hours before the campers ever arrive.

When July arrives, JA of McComb members, campers, staff, and volunteers descend on Percy Quin State Park for a week of fun daily activities which include nature walks, pontoon boat rides, dance, arts and crafts, swimming, horseback riding, and recreation games. The campers get an opportunity to participate in all of the activities, following a group rotation schedule with their cabins. Each camper is paired with at least one of the high school or college volunteers who supervises and assists him or her at all times during their entire stay at camp.

In addition to the daily rotation of activities, each day at Camp Sunshine includes at least one special event to thrill the campers. On Thursday morning, the McComb Fire Department donates and cooks a delicious breakfast. The campers love dining with the local heroes! On Thursday evenings, there is always a “field trip” activity planned. In the late afternoon, everyone loads up on buses to have some fun away from camp. In 2017, the field trip was to the McComb Mill to eat a dinner donated by the local hospital and to enjoy a movie night complete with movie theater snacks. The ladies of JA had completely transformed the warehouse into a movie theater! Everyone had a blast!
On Friday evenings, campers enjoy some stage time, singing karaoke and encouraging their friends in the camp pavilion. All campers have the opportunity to be a star, selecting their own music to perform. Saturday mornings bring an Olympic-style group competition between the cabins. Members of the community are encouraged to attend and line the road to the field, cheering on the camper-athletes during the procession and then later during the games. Games include races, water balloon tosses, and a shaving cream fight with the counselors. Campers and counselors always look forward to the silly chaos that this event inevitably brings!

On Saturday evening, the community is invited to return to camp to support the campers as they have their annual Skit Night. Campers take the skits very seriously, making their own costumes and props to use. While the competition is fierce, everyone has fun and leaves a winner! Afterwards, a live band plays and everyone stays to dance, sing, and visit with the campers. Saturday night serves as a reunion for many former counselors and volunteers who bring their families out to Percy Quin to fall in love with Camp Sunshine just as they did years ago.

Camp Sunshine concludes on Sunday morning with a very special church service under the pavilion. Music is provided by local “celebrity” Miss Mattie Rials, Director of Children’s Programming at the McComb Library, who leads the group in classic camp songs and Christian hymns before a local pastor presents a brief message of encouragement. Refreshed from a week of rest and peace of mind knowing that their children were well-taken care of, caregivers pick up the campers who leave in high spirits with memories that will last a lifetime.

A “Countdown for Camp Sunshine” begins on the JA Facebook page as soon as camp ends because JA members, volunteers, and campers alike look forward to reuniting with old
friends and making new friends at camp. Almost immediately, the planning for the next year’s camp begins. Camp Sunshine is truly the highlight of every year for the Junior Auxiliary of McComb, Mississippi, as it is the chapter’s largest, longest-running, and most-beloved project by far! The chapter plans to continue the project indefinitely, maintaining the sweet traditions of the past while adding activities and conveniences to make the experience enjoyable for today’s campers. Without question, JA of McComb’s Camp Sunshine is a staple of the entire Pike County community.