

Counselors Defined Camp

"We believe that the counselors are the most important single element in the camp assuring a healthy and helpful experience for the campers." So said a 1962 brochure for Camp Red Cedar Forest, one of several day camps offered over the years by the YMCA of Greater Kansas City. Selected for their maturity, Christian leadership potential and specific camping skills, Y counselors provided supervision, leadership and friendship to the campers placed in their charge.

From the early days of the Y's camping program, emphasis was placed on quality counselors. Noting that the "contagious personalities of the leaders create the atmosphere of the Camp," a 1929 Camp Gravois brochure featured pictures of the strapping young men who would offer campers models of Christian character.

In addition to Christian personalities, successful counselors were those individuals who were well-versed in group work and camp lore. Being a good storyteller helped too. Friday nights at Camp Santosage were reserved for campfires and ghost stories, and the counselor who could send a shiver down campers' spines was sure to go down in camp lore as one of the best.

When Y camping went coed, counselors, like campers, came in both sexes. The shift initially caused some parents to inquire whether counselors were more concerned with campers or other counselors, but boundaries were quickly established and counselors continued to earn high marks from both parents and campers. "Shelby seems to be an excellent counselor," remarked one parent on her camp assessment form. "I hope he will be there next year too."

Young people with an interest in becoming camp counselors often served initially as counselors-in-training. Paired with junior and senior counselors, the trainees were encouraged to get a feel for the challenges and responsibilities that counseling held. Similarly, the L.I.T.

(Leaders in Training) program offered 16- and 17-year-olds the chance to develop the leadership and decision-making skills essential to becoming a good counselor.

While careful selection and good training helped ensure that counselors did their jobs well, the ultimate approval came from the campers themselves. Santosage camper Staci Dennis, who expressed herself in a poem published in the camp's *Smoke Signals*, summed it up best: "When I grow up and get big to be, I'll come to camp and be an L.I.T."



James "Mote" Reno served as Camp Gravois' cook for more than 25 years. Mote became a camp institution to whom several generations of campers turned for guidance and advice.