

# THE CARSON CONNECTION

Welcome Home to YMCA Camp Carson



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# SUMMER CAMP 2025



Campers sailed through some high seas adventures with Princess Pat and her Mighty Fine Crew this Summer, with lots of silly songs and skits. Each week was filled with all of the traditional camp activities - archery, pottery, climbing, sailing, arts & crafts, and more.

1467 campers joined us through nine weeks of summer camp, including two weeks of camps exclusively for kids from Military families, at reduced or no cost. This summer, more than 1/3 of our campers received some level of scholarship or subsidy to help with the cost of camp.

Our Camp Counselors came from 11 states, plus 15 international staff from 12 countries.

As we sail through Summer with delightful memories and lifelong friendships, we appreciate all of the donors who help make YMCA Camp Carson as magical as navigating by a starry night on the open sea.

## Camp Carson Ragers

The YMCA Ragers program at Camp Carson is an optional, progressive goal-setting program helping campers become the best version of themselves. Each colored rag is an outward symbol of an inward goal.

This Summer, we were honored to guide 224 campers and staff through the Ragers program.



## 2025 CAMP CARSON ROCKERS

We are so proud of all of the campers who gained new skills and achieved their goals this year. The following campers earned Rockers at Camp Carson this summer!

The Carson Rocker award takes a lot of commitment. To earn this distinction, campers must:

- earn all 5 levels at an activity area
- teach a counselor all 5 levels at that activity
- teach a new camper all 5 levels of that activity

### Alpine Tower

Alex Patterson  
Avery Slade  
Cole Shaughnessy  
Kaleigh Collazo  
Oliver Conley  
Tristan French

### Basketball

Charlie Spurlock  
Liam Fischer

### Archery

Aleah Crews  
Alex Mathews  
Ashlyn Sills  
Colby Schaefer  
Easton Riley  
Jacob Fields  
Layla Bigham  
Lincoln Brown  
Luke Brown  
Natalie Roberts  
Sophie Fowler

### Boating

Leah Hartz

### Fishing

Matt Peters

### Pottery

Nova Reinhart  
Poppy Waller

### Sailing

Colin Crawford  
Grace Scribner  
Katie Kuhnle  
Mike Kichler  
Olivia Long

### Rifles

Joseph Faulkner

### Soccer

Chapman Anderson  
Charlotte Huber  
Chase Johnson  
Henry Knight  
Isaac Waller  
Luke Abeln  
Mack Northington

### Woodworking

Alexis Wilson  
Jordan Krueger  
Madalyn Heitzman  
Skyla Chenoweth

# A MESSAGE FROM JIM

Greetings from YMCA Camp Carson!

What an amazing year it has been! 2025 marked the 85<sup>th</sup> year of Camp Carson, and we celebrated during Labor Day Family Weekend with around 200 Alumni and friends. In addition to nine weeks of Summer camp, we also hosted the NASP Archery Tournament, three Military Family Weekends, and Fall Camp.

We continue to find ways to grow and serve the community, with schools and local organizations enjoying camp activities almost every day and weekend this Fall.

This Fall and Winter, we are also working to complete the new Music Center, and tackling exciting projects like new water lines and invasive species.

I am incredibly thankful to be a part of this time in Camp Carson's rich history.

I hope you will come visit camp and share your stories with us!



## HONORING A CAMP CARSON LEGEND



Terry & Linda Yunker at Camp with their children Krista, Jason, and Todd

The Terry Yunker Camper Scholarship Fund is being established by a kind donor and friend, who has offered to match up to \$5,000 of donations to create a scholarship fund for campers to attend YMCA Camp Carson.

Terry was a legend to campers and staff of the 60s-80s, with the incredible talent of remembering EVERY camper's name.

Terry was a great advocate for Camp Carson throughout his life, serving on Camp's Board of Advisors for many decades after his Camp career ended. He was very vocal about the importance of camp scholarships for kids, as he believed that every child could benefit from a Camp experience. By creating this scholarship fund, we honor his memory and ensure that Camp can be accessible to ALL young people.

[Please CLICK HERE to help provide scholarships for campers in Terry's memory.](#)

# SUMMER STAFF AWARDS

## 2025 MARK KNIESE SCHOLARSHIP

The Mark Kniese Scholarship was created in 2002 by YMCA Camp Carson alum August Neal, in memory of former counselor Mark Kniese. This year, we were thrilled to host Jeff and Skip Kniese at the awards banquet and August Neal joined us by zoom. They each shared stories of Mark, and August explained the purpose of the scholarship.

Justin shared these thoughts: "Camp Carson has taught me more about life, leadership and service than any classroom ever could. It's set the foundation of my journey to Purdue University where I am working towards becoming a doctor. Just as I support my campers through hard moments and growth, I want to one day support my patients with the same care and presence."



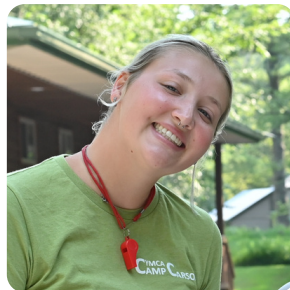
Justin O'Connor

## 2025 LLOYD OUTSTANDING COUNSELORS & STAFF MEMBER

This award was created by Dr. Thomas Lloyd, a YMCA Camp Carson Alum & Bridge Builder, who established a named Endowment Fund with the purpose of awarding scholarships each year for the Outstanding Boys and Girls Counselors, and Outstanding Staff Member. We are so grateful Dr. Lloyd's commitment to Camp Carson and our staff!



Outstanding Boys Counselor  
Dawson Blankenbuehler-Lee



Outstanding Girls Counselor  
Ally Fulcher



Outstanding Staff Member  
Ein Freeman

## 2025 CERRITOS GATTO FAMILY SCHOLARSHIP



Meagan Spicer

The Cerritos Gatto Family Staff Scholarship was established by Henry Cerritos and Donna Gatto, whose family has been involved with and attending YMCA Camp Carson for many years. The scholarship is awarded to a summer staff member who exemplifies the spirit of YMCA Camp Carson and has a positive approach with campers and staff.

This year's scholarship was awarded to Meagan Spicer, who is studying Recreation, Parks, and Non-profit Administration at Western Kentucky University. "I chose this career route truly because of my experiences at places like camp. I want to be a part of supporting organizations that build people up. Ones that encourage care, service, love, and so much more."

# CAMP CARSON AMAZING ALUMNI

## CHRISTINE KNAPP FEKETE



**Christine Knapp Fekete is a Camp Carson Alum from the 70s-80s. We are so thrilled that Christine has taken the time to share her story with us:**

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It was the summer of '79...(Bryan Adams throwback for my fellow Gen Xers).

I remember my mom telling me I was going to camp.  
I don't remember if I actually wanted to go to camp.  
I do remember very much not wanting to stay at camp.

The homesickness was soul-level excruciating. The body, mind and spirit of my 11 year-old self wanted to go home. The body, mind and spirit of my 57 year-old self is grateful she stayed.

Somewhere buried within my "depths of despair" I was learning not only could I survive outside my comfort zone, I could thrive there.

I'd become the first female recipient of the Don Kerr "camper of the year" award- an award reenacted after years of dormancy. (I like to tell myself that my "awesomeness" demanded it.)

I joined the C.I.T. program with fellow homesickness survivor Holly Jaleski. It was a lot of work for little money but (at the risk of sounding cliché) the life-experience was invaluable. Each summer brought a deeper sense of self-awareness. I became a leader with a servant's heart, a teacher, a creative and a performer.

After graduating Western Kentucky University (1990) I moved to San Diego to work with high school students with Campus Crusade for Christ. I married, moved to Nashville, joined the staff of a church where I pioneered a youth ministry. Doug and I then moved to London where we launched a Christian youth center in a Muslim, Hindu and Sikh community. London is where I birthed three out of four children. After our return to Nashville, we adopted four more.

**Continued on the next page...**



# AMAZING ALUMNI CONTINUED

## CHRISTINE KNAPP FEKETE

We didn't adopt babies, we adopted older children. (Apparently, there is a combination of antidepressants and pinot grigio that leads one to believe she can save the world.)

Because we didn't do the math, there was a time when we had seven children under the age of 10. In 2006, I started a gift line called THINK HAPPY STUFF. (I also needed the reminder to do so.) I believe everything we surround ourselves with makes a difference- even the coffee mug we choose.  
([www.thinkhappystuff.com](http://www.thinkhappystuff.com))

This is also the season I began to commercialize my abstract work. I readily boast of having pieces worldwide- mostly because of the fact that many of the prominent pieces were created in the midst of persevering through challenging times which were no less soul-level excruciating than the homesickness in 1979. I've come to believe that sometimes, survival in and of itself, is "success".

I'm now an LA-based actor, writer and comedian. I've worked with everyone from Jane Fonda, John Lithgow, Larry David to names of which we may never come familiar. I have an upcoming (teenie tiny) role in an upcoming Michael Jackson biopic.



I've toured the world performing stand-up comedy. I used to perform on cruise ships. However, I soon discovered that a ship full of people who spend a LOT of money on alcohol packages don't want to listen to 45 minutes of material on my sobriety journey.

I started acting at age 47 and stand-up at 50. Perhaps seemingly most absurd (as it all seems to me) at 57, I became a "social media influencer/comedic political commentator" with over 200k followers (and growing daily). The reality that one can make a living this way has me questioning why I ever went college.

It's been a joy to maintain friendships with fellow counselor alumni Holly, Lance Morton, Becky Gaiser and others. Memories abound.

**Instagram:** [what.the.fekete](https://www.instagram.com/what.the.fekete)

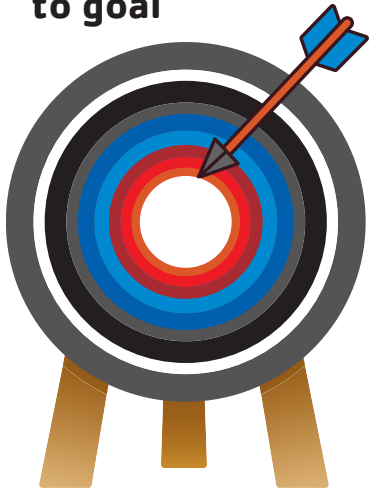
**Facebook:** [Christine Knapp Fekete](https://www.facebook.com/ChristineKnappFekete)

**TikTok:** [christinefekete91](https://www.tiktok.com/@christinefekete91)

**We love hearing about our Amazing Alumni and share their stories! If you (or someone you know) would like to be featured in our newsletter, please contact Heather at [hpierce@ymcacampcarson.org](mailto:hpierce@ymcacampcarson.org) . Or anytime you are in town, please stop by for a visit - you can share stories while we wander around Camp!**

# ANNUAL CAMPAIGN UPDATE

**85.7%  
to goal**



We are truly grateful for all of you who have already contributed to our 2025 Annual Campaign. The adventures of camp create a lasting impact on kids by developing confidence, and helping them find ways to make a positive difference in the world. Your kind donation helps every child, regardless of their background, have a great summer camp experience.

Your donation reaches campers in these ways:

- Camper scholarships & subsidies for young people who may not be able to afford camp.
- Lower camp fees for our Operation Military Support summer camp program.
- Supports a matching grant of \$7,500 for our Military Family Weekends.
- Improved programs and facilities, to keep Camp Carson a safe and positive space for campers.

**We welcome your donations online at [www.campcarson.org/giving](http://www.campcarson.org/giving) or mail to: YMCA Camp Carson, 2034 Outer Lake Rd, Princeton, IN, 47670**

We are also grateful for “in kind” donations – items that you would like to give to Camp. Currently on our wishlist: Landscape gravel, golf cart for guests, lumber, picnic tables, small ice machine.

## TURN DREAMS INTO ADVENTURES

**YMCA Camp Carson 2025 Annual Campaign**

### CAMP CARSON BRIDGE BUILDERS

Each Summer, we invite our Bridge Builders to join us for meals at Camp – these kind (and brave) donors eat in the Dining Hall with our campers and staff, and participate in all of the rowdiness and joy that camp meals bring. We enjoy sharing the liveliness of Camp, and the opportunity for donors to see the impact their gift has on all of these campers.

The Bridge Builders at YMCA Camp Carson are a dedicated group of donors who make a significant impact at Camp, helping us continue the legacy and mission, while growing and serving more campers.

Here are some ways you can become a Bridge Builder:

- Designate YMCA Camp Carson, a registered 501(c)3 not-for-profit organization, as a beneficiary in your will, living trust, or life insurance policy.
- Make a tax-deductible cash, or stock contribution of \$1,000 or more to the YMCA Camp Carson Endowment Fund.
- Make a gift of real estate or personal property to YMCA Camp Carson.
- Lifetime contributions to YMCA Camp Carson of \$5,000 or more.

Please contact Heather at 812-385-3597 or [hpierce@ymcacampcarson.org](mailto:hpierce@ymcacampcarson.org) for more information.



# FALL AT YMCA CAMP CARSON



During our Labor Day Family Camp, we also celebrated Camp Carson's 85<sup>th</sup> Birthday! We hosted alumni and friends for an afternoon of swimming, boating, cookout, and hootenanny.

Of course, no Camp Carson event is complete without lots of stories. In the photo to the right, Alumni Rick Goelz (also 85 this year!) shared stories with the legendary Porky. It was a memorable event, and we are so thankful for everyone who joined us.

Family Camp, Fall Camp, and Military Family Camps (oh my!!) Although we are a Summer Camp at heart, we love Fall at Camp Carson! We quickly switch from everyday Summer chaos to a broad range of Fall groups and activities. We have a calendar full of Outdoor Education groups, Family Camp, Military Family Weekends, Camp Corral Family Weekend, church events, Fall Camp, cabin rentals, Scouts, organizations, retreats, and conferences.



Since 2020, Military Family Weekends have become one of our favorite Fall events. We host three weekends exclusively for Military families, sponsored by a generous grant and several local organizations. Families spend the weekend together in their own cabin and have the opportunity to experience all of the fun Camp activities. We are so grateful for these special families, and for the wonderful donors who make these weekends possible.



# WHAT'S NEXT AT CAMP CARSON?

## 2026 Earth Aware Program

**FREE for schools and students! March 6, 12, & 18**

We are very excited to offer a NEW Earth Aware Day Camp program for local schools. So much of the Camp experience is outdoors and exploring our environment. We have created a one-day environmentally-focused learning program for fourth-grade students. These day camps will offer kids the opportunity to participate in a wide range of outdoor activities, learn about our environment, and hopefully explore nature in ways they never have before.



ALL local schools are invited to join us for a full day of Earth and Environmental activities, learning, and outdoor fun. Schools can choose to bring a small class group or multiple classes, and will learn alongside other schools and students throughout that day.

This program was made possible through support from Lilly Endowment, Inc. and YMCA of the USA.

**Spots are limited to 300 participants, so please [CLICK HERE to register your class today!](#)**

## Registration is OPEN for Summer 2026!

Don't delay - Summer 2026 is already filling up! We have two regular weeks that are almost full, as well as our teen programs. Visit [campcarson.org](http://campcarson.org) to register today!

- Overnight Camp Session
- 1st Year Dirt Bike
- Wrangler
- Operation Military Support
- Wrangler in Training (WIT)
- Counselor in Training (CIT)
- Leader in Training (LIT)

We can help with the cost of Camp! We have scholarships and Foster Care camper scholarships available. Please apply here: [campcarson.org/financial-assistance](http://campcarson.org/financial-assistance)



**Register  
Today!**

# CHECK OUT OUR ONLINE CAMP STORE!



[campcarsonalumni.org](https://campcarsonalumni.org)  
click on Camp Store

## Discover More at YMCA Camp Carson!

### RENTALS



YMCA Camp Carson is the perfect venue for a retreat, reunion, corporate meeting, or team-building activity. We offer a variety of spaces, both small and large, as well as indoor and outdoor options—combining practical amenities with a welcoming camp atmosphere.

### OUTDOOR EDUCATION



YMCA Camp Carson has created an Outdoor Education program for local schools and youth programs with options for day or overnight trips. We can customize the day(s) based on your school's preferences.

### WEDDINGS



YMCA Camp Carson provides stunning venues for both indoor and outdoor weddings, featuring a picturesque lakefront amphitheater, an outdoor chapel, and scenic suspension bridges.

\*Photo courtesy of Kendalyn Nicole Photography

To book an event or request a quote, go to [campcarson.org/events](https://campcarson.org/events) or contact Ryan Meeks at 812-385-3597 or [rmeeks@ymcacampcarson.org](mailto:rmeeks@ymcacampcarson.org)



It's easy to join our  
mailing list!

Just send your email address  
**BY TEXT MESSAGE:**

Text   
**CAMPCARSON**  
to **42828**

The Carson Connection is our digital newsletter, designed to share updates with Alumni, Donors, Camper families, and our local Community. Follow us on Facebook, Instagram, or [campcarson.org](http://campcarson.org) for more updates and opportunities to CONNECT.



FOR YOUTH DEVELOPMENT  
FOR HEALTHY LIVING  
FOR SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

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