

PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

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“Signs” of Summer
Mill Neck’s Sign Language Camp for Hearing Kids

“Awesome!” “Perfect!” “A wonderful experience!” These are just some of the reactions from the 55 children who attended Sign Camp for Hearing Kids, run by Mill Neck Foundation this summer. Now in its thirteenth year, the Camp, held on Mill Neck’s 86-acre campus, is held two consecutive weeks each July. This unique opportunity offers kids, ages 8 to 16, a chance to learn American Sign Language (ASL) while participating in typical summer camp activities. Through daily socializing with students attending the Mill Neck Manor School for the Deaf summer program, the campers were able to practice their newly acquired skills, as sign language was the sole way to communicate.

To ensure the best possible experience, the children are divided by age (ages 8 - 12 and 13 - 16) to learn sign language letters and numbers as well as signs for animals, food, colors and more. Classes are led by Deaf instructors with assistance from hearing teachers and Deaf Mill Neck students. Campers further learn sign through various activities, games and arts and crafts. By the end of session one, campers are able to have basic conversations in sign and are encouraged to return for the second session to build their skills with additional enjoyable and educational activities. Session two is perfect for campers with some prior sign knowledge, or for those who have completed session one or another beginner class.

Of course, what would summer camp be without tie dyeing, water games and arts and crafts? Kids naturally had their favorites. Richard, 14, a first time camper from Locust Valley, liked theme days best, where kids came to camp dressed in pajamas or as famous people. When asked for his favorite activity, Bayville resident, Gunnar, 10, responded, “Art.” Emily, a 14-year-old camper from Merrick, voted for “tie dyeing and water balloons.” Water games, in particular, rated as a favorite among most of the campers. On one especially hot day, kids welcomed water balloon “dodgeball,” and splash tag, where everyone wound up soaked and laughing. And just when all the kids thought it was time to head back inside, the counselors ambushed them with buckets of water!

Characteristic activities aside, many campers cited time spent with their new Deaf friends from Mill Neck as one of the best things about Sign Camp. Through interactions on the playground, during sports and at lunch, all the kids had the opportunity to see how much more they’re alike

than different, even as they learned about the different ways a Deaf person does some things, like using an alarm clock. A majority of the campers said they planned to stay in touch after camp ends. Among those are Leah, 13, from Old Westbury, and Renee, 14, from Farmingdale, who are six-year veterans of Sign Camp. They rate being with their Mill Neck friends as one of the best things about camp and both said they will email, text and “friend” on Facebook to keep in touch.

“Over the years, quite a few campers and Mill Neck students have kept in touch. I’ve heard of them hanging out, even attending each other’s proms,” said Gabrielle Barry, a science teacher at Mill Neck and this year’s camp coordinator. She added, “I’ve already heard some of the kids this summer saying that they’ll stay in touch.”

At the end of each week, campers had a chance to show off their new language skills at a special performance held in the school’s auditorium. After a slide presentation of the week’s experiences and a variety show by campers and counselors, the kids signed and sang the words of two songs they learned. Parents, school staff and students were treated to Katy Perry’s “Firework,” the first Friday, and “I Just Can’t Wait to be King,” from The Lion King, the second week. For their efforts, the campers received a prolonged round of applause!

For their part, the Mill Neck students welcomed the campers, sharing how friendly and enthusiastic the hearing kids were to learn sign language. There were a lot of laughs when campers sometimes got mixed up and “said” an incorrect word. “But we tried to be patient!” relayed the Deaf students.

In general, campers and Mill Neck students enjoyed two weeks in each other’s company, with each group getting a little life experience along with silly summer camp fun. Overall, a very positive “sign” of summer.

Mill Neck Manor School for the Deaf and the Early Childhood Center are part of the Mill Neck Family of Organizations, a not-for-profit group dedicated to enhancing the quality of life for people who are Deaf, or who have other special communication needs, through excellence in individually designed educational, vocational or spiritual programs and services. For more information, please call (516) 922-4100 or visit <http://www.millneck.org>.

Photo Captions:

1. Mill Neck students Abigail Bethon, David Arevalo and Perla Cerritos join camper Megan Wolyniec for outdoor recreation.
2. Campers dress up for Famous Person Day.
3. Richard Kihm and Dylan DelGuidice show off their new language skills.

