

Camp Magik provides healing

By Kimberly Brown
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The messages on the brightly-colored "memory pillows" are poignant and simple: "May u always b with me," "I'll love you forever and always," "You'll always be my Bubba!" and "Make it stop." Some wrote scriptures on their pillows; most wrote an important date - the day their loved one died.

The memory pillows were created this past weekend at Camp Magik, by children who lost a father, a mother or sibling. Camp Magik (Mainly About Grief In Kids) is a healing camp founded in 1995 by Rene Searles McClatchey. Held in different places, this session was held Oct. 6-8 at the YWCO camp in Turnerville.

The 47 camp attendees, ages 7-17, participated in fun, "normal" camp activities such as canoeing and archery. On Saturday, there was a ropes course and talent show; on Sunday, a puppetry show for the younger children and a play for the older ones. McClatchey said that the play is put on by professional actors from Atlanta, funded by Kaiser Permanente.

The unique thing about Camp Magik is activities are planned to help the children deal with their grief. The children attended a memorial service by the light of the full moon at the lake, with each child floating a candle for his or her lost loved one. Balloons were released on Sunday and the children held messages in their minds to send with the balloons.

Six counseling sessions, led by licensed professional

counselors, were intertwined throughout the three days' activities. On Sunday, parents were invited to attend their own workshop.

McClatchey has held two camps per year until this year, when she held three because of the long waiting list.

Camp Magik is primarily held in Georgia, but, McClatchey said, "Three years ago we were asked to bring our camp to West Virginia for children who'd lost someone in the Sept. 11, 2001, Pentagon attack."

The camp is free to the families who attend. Each camp is funded by "various generous people," McClatchey said. "This [Turnerville] camp is funded by a gentleman who lost his mother when he was 14. He's become a volunteer for the camp and generously paid for this camp."

McClatchey began Camp Magik because she saw the need for it.

"I worked in hospice and there was nowhere to refer young children who'd lost a parent," McClatchey said. "I started identifying [with the children] because I lost my father when I was a teenager. I was a single mom and wondered what would happen to my children if they lost me."

"I started group sessions every Tuesday night every eight weeks," she said, "but I didn't feel that got the children to know each other well enough. So I came up with the camp idea."

McClatchey is working on her Ph.D. through The Univer-



Staff/Kimberly Brown
Rene Searles McClatchey, founder of Camp Magik, shows Gracie Whitley of Lilburn, right, and Brooke Hall of Dacula how to decorate their memory pillows on Sunday. Camp Magik is a healing camp for children who have lost a close loved one.

sity of Georgia, and she is writing her dissertation on the success of the camp. Her research has shown that such a camp is "very effective" helping grieving children cope.

Volunteer Kennon McCollum is the "camp nurse and gopher," and this was his ninth camp.

Until they come to the camp, he said, many children feel alone in their grief.

"It's a fantastic place for kids to be with other kids who have been through the same thing. They can know they're not the only ones" who have lost someone they love, McCollum said.

For information about the camp, visit the Web site at www.campmagik.org or e-mail McClatchey at renesearles@campmagik.org.