

## AMPUTEE SUPPORT GROUP HOSTS FIRST CHILDREN'S CAMP

The Knoxville amputee support group, Amputees Coming Together, sponsored its first children's camp on July 14-16, 1995. Fantastic weather, kids and volunteers made the event a true success and plans are already underway for an expanded camp for next year. The idea for a camp was raised when the group decided that the ski trip in the winter, lake parties in the summer and the golf outing in the fall just were not enough activity for the group.

The group was very fortunate to find a sponsor in the Tennessee Occupational Therapy Association. The TOTA group held a 5 kilometer run/ 1 mile walk to raise money for the camp. They were able to raise \$3,000.00 which was more than enough to support all expenses associated with the three day event. Additional donations were made by area food centers (Kroger, Winn-Dixie, Bi-Lo, Ham and Goodies, Damage Recovery Systems), businesses (Tuckaleechee Caverns) and anonymous individuals (sort of).

The weekend began by an exhilarating trip down the Hiwassee River in rubber rafts that held two campers and two volunteers each. Water fights, waves and fun were the order of the day. Most of the campers and volunteers had never rafted but all are ready to go on a bigger river next year. We arrived at Wesley Woods in Townsend, Tennessee late that night and after a fine camp dinner it was off to bed. The accommodations at Wesley Woods were plush and 26 of us ~~sleep~~<sup>slept</sup> comfortably in air-conditioned surroundings with flush toilets! We weren't really roughing it.

Saturday morning began with a brief hike up to the ROPES course. We were introduced to the joys of tying a nylon rope tightly around legs and waists to serve as a harness. The tighter the better they said, to ensure our safety, and we tugged and pulled those straps tight. The youngest campers tried the course first and then the older ones, with and without ropes experience, showed us how it was done. Everyone, campers and volunteers who wanted to try their nerve and ability on the ropes, had a chance to do it. The highlight of the course was definitely the final section where you got to ride down a "Zip cord." It was like a bottomless slide on a pulley. You went over the treetops and ended in the arms of your fellow campers at the end. It was challenging for all who participated and nerve wracking for those who watched and cheered.

After a quick lunch we headed to Tuckaleechee Caverns. The two hour tour underground was fascinating. We learned about rock formations and got to taste water that is 99.9% pure. There were numerous steps and ramps but everyone made it without a problem. When we surfaced it was time to go back to camp for a much needed swim. Campers who had never swam or dived found, that with the encouragement and support of new friends, they could do it and smiles were everywhere.

Still on the run, we had a great spaghetti dinner and then went down to the fire circle to hear a storyteller conjure tales of spirits, ghouls and humor. She entertained us for over an hour and then the rain began to fall. But not to be swayed from our activities, we

roasted our marshmallows and ate S'mores. Unfortunately, we didn't bring flashlights with us to the fire circle so groped our way back to the cabin. Not really groping as there were a few street lights here and there. When we got back some of the more "mature" campers had pulled a few pranks which will not be mentioned here. Suffice it to say that paybacks were in order and the junior campers did a fine job of it.

The campers then stayed up most of the night, no, all of the night. By now they knew each other well and had little need for sleep and a great need to talk the night away! Which they did. They seemed to manage it fine and were pleasant and ready for the day when the sun came up. A ~~thorough~~ cleaning of the facilities preceded our departure to a farm in the area. We were treated to a hayride pulled by three huge draft horses and a wonderful meal. The campers and volunteers all received awards and a fantastic T-shirt whose design was made especially for us and donate by Kristen Tobler of Oak Ridge.

The highlight of the day was the softball game that followed against five University of Tennessee football players and their athletic trainer. These men were big in size and heart. I believe they could have slaughtered us and perhaps they did but we were all having to good a time to really pay attention to the score or normal softball rules (We got 6 outs per inning and they got 2. That's fair.).

Too soon it was time to say our good-byes. But only good-bye for the moment. We are planning another, slightly longer camp for next year and hope to see old and new faces next year. The camp was tremendously successful thanks to the help of the ACT group and all the volunteers. What a wonderful feelings to work hard and see the results of that labor in the smiles of the entire group and the memories that will last a lifetime.