

Neighbor



Hot tickets Things worth checking out this week ...

1 See “A Midsummer Night’s Dream” performed at 7 p.m. today in Central Park, 104 E. Benton Ave., Naperville. The park opens at 6 p.m. Free. Info: (630) 848-5000 or visit napervilleparks.org.

2 The Hot Jazz – 6 Cool Nites concert series debuts at 8 p.m. today. The series, featuring the faculty artists in the Janice Borla Vocal Jazz Camp, continues at 8 p.m. Saturday, and Monday through Thursday in North Central College’s Heining Auditorium, Larrance Academic Center, 309 E. School St., Naperville. Tickets: \$15 for adults, \$12 students and seniors. Info: (630) 637-5620.

3 South East Association for Special Parks and Recreation’s annual splash party runs 6:30 to 9:30 p.m. Sunday at Cypress Cove Family Water Park, 8301 Janes Ave., Woodridge. Admission: \$10. Proceeds will help buy an accessible minibus. Info: (630) 960-7600 voice, (630) 960-7605 TDD.

4 “Ferris Bueller’s Day Off” will be shown at 8:30 p.m. Saturday outdoors at Lisle Station Museum, 921 School St., as part of Lisle Park District’s monthly summer series celebrating its 40th anniversary. Lawn seating. Cost: \$5 in advance, \$7 at the gate. Info: (630) 964-3410 or lisleparkdistrict.org.

5 The Party That Shall Not Be Named — celebrating the release of the seventh and final Harry Potter book — runs all afternoon and evening today as downtown Naperville does its best impression of Hogsmeade. Activities are planned at 65 participating merchants leading up the midnight release of “Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows.” Info: andersonsbookshop.com, visitnaperville.com or downtownnaperville.com.



“WDSRA enables Troy to do childhood things. He wouldn’t be able to participate without someone one-on-one.”

Cheryl Butler, mother of 11-year-old autistic boy, on Western DuPage Special Recreation Association’s inclusion services

Camp for everyone



WDSRA’s services let special-needs children join in on summer fun

BY SUSAN DIBBLE
sdibble@dailyherald.com

Naperville mother Cheryl Butler knows her son, Troy, is challenging.

Troy, almost 12, frequently does what he shouldn’t. Generous with his hugs and sociable without understanding relationship boundaries, he invades other people’s space.

He’s not the kind of kid who gets invited to friends’ houses after school or to birthday parties.

But Troy, who has autism, is having a wonderful summer playing games, doing crafts and taking field trips in the Teen Trails Day Camp program sponsored by the Heritage YMCA Group and Naperville Park District.

Thanks to the inclusion services provided by Western DuPage Special Recreation Association, Troy can participate in the regular camp activities, Butler said.

“WDSRA enables Troy to do childhood things,” Butler said. “He wouldn’t be able to participate without someone one-on-one.”

That someone is Joe Cantu, a special education teacher who works as an inclusion support staff member during the summer.

Cantu said his role is to help Troy keep on track by reiterating the rules, getting Troy to take a break when he’s overstimulated and encouraging him to be part of the group.

“He wants to be part of the group, but he doesn’t necessarily want to do what the group is doing,” Cantu said. “I help him make the right decisions lots of times.”

In the three years he’s worked with Troy, Cantu said he’s seen his charge continue to make progress. Troy used to occasionally hit someone, he said.

“I never see that any more,” he said. “I see him more willing to cooperate.”

For his part, Troy is thoroughly attached to his mentor and has developed a relationship with him outside of camp as well.

“Throw it,” he says, handing Cantu a ball.

“Help me,” he tells Cantu as the group prepares to go into the woods for an activity.

Not every special-needs child requires one-to-one assistance, but the aim of the inclusion program is to provide what’s needed for the child to be part of camp, said Tammy Kerrins, inclusion manager with WDSRA.

For some children that may be adaptive equipment or a sign language interpreter. Children with sensory disorders like autism may need objects to fidget with to calm themselves down or picture schedules to know what to



PHOTOS BY MARCELLE BRIGHT/mbright@dailyherald.com

As an inclusion support staffer, Joe Cantu, kneeling, helps Troy Butler, who has autism, participate in the Teen Trails Day Camp. Cantu reminds Troy of the rules of games and helps him make good social decisions. Above right, Troy chats with fellow campers. Attending the camp has improved Troy’s social skills and independence, staff members say.



Troy is spending his summer playing games, taking field trips and making crafts thanks to inclusion support services offered by the Western DuPage Special Recreation Association.

expect for the day.

WDSRA prepares camp staff members by meeting them in the beginning of the summer, then provides support throughout the program, said Katie Maloney, family services director with Koehler Family YMCA.

“It’s about making friends. It’s about having fun,” she said. “It’s all about making kids successful.”

Kerrins said the inclusion program is well-used. This summer, inclusion services have been used in about 700

registrations in camp and park programs in the nine communities WDSRA serves, more than 300 of them in Naperville alone.

In Naperville, the Naperville Park District and Heritage YMCA Group jointly sponsor three day camps for different ages in which inclusion services are available. WDSRA also provides inclusion services throughout the year for any park programs in its member communities of Naperville, Bloomingdale, Carol Stream, Glen Ellyn,

Roselle, Warrenville, West Chicago, Wheaton and Winfield.

“We have many families who participate year after year,” Kerrins said. “But there are still many families that don’t know the service is available.”

Penny Boyle of Naperville said she was not aware of the service the first year her daughter, Sophie, now 9, enrolled in the park district and YMCA’s Pathfinders camp. Sophie, who has difficulty with her speech and with processing information, has a tendency to wander off when something interesting catches her eye. When camp staff suggested a one-to-one assistant for Sophie, Boyle readily agreed.

“I think it gives everybody peace of mind knowing somebody is keeping an eye on her,” Boyle said. “Having this inclusion program is a lifesaver.”

Being part of the camp is helping Sophie learn social skills — like taking turns, saying “hi” and “bye,” and asking another child to play with her, her mother said.

“She really enjoys it and she’s having a great time,” Boyle said. “I think it’s the greatest thing.”

Special needs kids particularly enjoy water games that involve the senses, said Chuck Trabaris, director of the Teen Trails Camp that Troy attends. Troy also loves to write stories and asks other kids to help him by writing down what he says, Trabaris said.

“It helps them step outside their own shell,” he said.

The Teen Trails Camp averages 35 kids a week and typically has between three



For more information

• To learn more about Western DuPage Special Recreation Association’s inclusion services, call (630) 681-0962.

and five with special needs, Trabaris said. When a special-needs child is having a meltdown, it’s not uncommon for another camper to step in and help them through the situation, he said.

“It helps other kids experience these special-needs kids and take more of a leadership role,” he said. “I think it’s a fantastic program.”

Tydra Davis, field supervisor for the camp inclusion program, spends her summers traveling from camp site to camp site, providing inclusion support where need.

Children who are initially afraid of a special-needs child may be the ones eager to help them by the end of the summer, she said.

“I’m actually seeing kids learn those lessons,” she said.

Davis, whose job is to resolve situations that arise at camps, carries a laundry

basket of toys in her car that may hold some of answers.

“The most common situations are during unstructured time at camp,” she said.

The solution may be to take the special-needs children aside for a modified activity, she said.

Although the inclusion support program is open to all special-needs children, it is most often used by those who have behavioral or mental disabilities such as autism, attention deficit disorder, Down syndrome and developmental delays, Davis said.

The cooperation of families, the longevity of many camp staff who return year after year, and support of community leaders help make the program a success, she said.

Troy, who has participated in WDSRA programs since he was 5, also receives inclusion services for programs during the school year.

Butler, a single working mom with one other son, calls WDSRA a gift from heaven.

“When you work with WDSRA, it opens doors,” she said. “(Without inclusion services) he wouldn’t do anything after school. There would be nothing. He couldn’t go to a ball field or participate in gymnastics.”

Davis, who is employed as a special-needs teacher during the school year, said parents with special-needs kids sometimes are afraid to let them participate.

“Inclusion doesn’t work for everyone,” she said. “(But) I would encourage all families to try it and see if it works for them.”

For information on inclusion services, call WDSRA at (630) 681-0962.