

Camp Krem stays optimistic despite another setback

VANDALS STEAL EQUIPMENT FROM BOULDER CREEK NONPROFIT

Since 1957, Camp Krem has been a hidden gem for children and adults with developmental disabilities. Nestled in the forest just above downtown Boulder Creek, the natural environment tabs itself as “a place for exceptional people to be themselves.”



CHRISTINA WISE

STAFF REPORTER

Spread over 87 acres, the 27 structures onsite include an arts and crafts building, multipurpose room, cabins, hiking trails, an all-accessible pool and an archery range. The setting is designed to let the spirits of those who attend flourish in nature, and provide a respite from life’s heavy lifts.

At least, it was until the CZU August Lightning Complex fires ripped through the area. Buildings, adaptive equipment, sleeping quarters and all the camp’s necessities were completely lost in the fire, leaving Camp Director Christina Krem down, but not out.

Krem, granddaughter of camp founder Alex Krem, grew up in New Zealand, but had heard tales about the magical place in the California redwoods since childhood. At 21, she came to work at the camp for the summer; years later, she became a weekend program director. Krem, now 34 and six years into her stint as director, can’t imagine a world without it.

“We still hold to the philosophies that my grandfather instituted, which revolve around ‘planned permissiveness,’ she said. “It’s the freedom for our campers to develop their own independence and make their own choices. In other camp environments, the recreation time is very structured and scheduled; at Camp Krem, we have options available, and we want the campers to select activities that make them happy.”

Those choices have changed with the times, and Krem says the broadening of their programs were a good fit for attendees.

“We had a music therapy program and animal care; we’d enriched our dance and drama offerings, and built a new playground,” she said. “There were a lot of program and facility improvements that were lost in August, and it was quite crushing to see people’s love and care for this special place be destroyed.”

Krem says she recognizes the larger impact of the fire’s toll.

“This didn’t just happen to us. Our whole community has gone through so much, and we know that so many of our dear friends and neighbors lost everything too,” she said. “It’s been a heartbreaking process, but our focus now is on rebuilding, and getting back to serving our community as quickly as possible.”

Camping Unlimited, the nonprofit umbrella for Camp

Krem, was just beginning its efforts to raise funds to rebuild the camp, when the organization was dealt yet another blow. Thieves broke through the lock on the property to steal and damage what the fire spared.

“Fire is indiscriminate, and there’s no rhyme or reason as to when and where it hits. This theft and vandalism, though, was extra hurtful and extra shocking, because it wasn’t an act of nature. It was deliberate and gratuitous and heartless,” she said.

As the fire approached, camp employees had little time to remove valuables from the site. Krem says their camp vans—used to transport people with disabilities—were broken into. Vandals also siphoned gas from the vans and stole a gas hose and a “very expensive generator.”

“That vehicle damage is another setback for us, which is frustrating,” she said.

Krem says her team loves the community of Boulder Creek, and is shaken by such a ghastly display of mean-spiritedness.

“We’ve been here for over half a century, so it’s disheartening to see this kind of criminal activity,” she said. “We’re really hoping that the sheriff’s office can help find who did this, and put a stop to this type of lawlessness. Our town deserves better than this.”

Despite the repeated setbacks, Krem says the mission of the camp is still to support their campers and their campers’ families. Due to the pandemic, they’ve had to pivot and provide virtual programs until they’re able to resume in-person activities.

“For now, our top priority is fundraising, so we can get the money we need to get back on our feet. We have a long road ahead of us where that’s concerned,” Krem said.

Camping Unlimited recently launched a \$5 million capital campaign, and is focused on crowdsourcing for the initial phase. Insurance money and FEMA funding will help offset part of the costs to rebuild, but Krem says there are limitations that come with accepting federal funds.

“For the projects that receive FEMA funding, we are only able to build it back to an equal replacement of what was lost; we’re not able to envision improved facilities under those parameters,” she said.

Structures that are funded by nongovernmental entities do not have those same restrictions, and Krem is looking forward to building back better—with sustainability and accessibility in mind.

Locals can absolutely help, and have already. Camp Krem was a designee of the Santa Cruz Gives campaign, collecting just over \$5,000 in donations. In addition, there is an online effort to raise awareness about the camp and its positive impact on those who consider Camp Krem their home away from home: 1,250 campers were served in 2019 alone, and many of them were repeat visitors.

“We have a generous and wonderful community, and we’re grateful for their continued support of our mission,” she said. “Our campers and their families are just the best, and the response that we’ve gotten from our camp community has been touching. We feel awful—we know that our campers are missing camp and our programs,

so it’s sad to hear them express those feelings. But every time we hear from them, it’s motivating: it’s why we have to rebuild. Our campers and their families are counting on us—they deserve this—and we have to work to bring it back. Ultimately, while it’s unfortunate that our facilities were lost, the spirit of our camp and our people is stronger than ever. This was just a setback, not the end, and we’re looking forward to coming back.”

Camp Krem’s rebuild project has been dubbed “Project Phoenix.” Information regarding the project can be found at bit.ly/3pHh6TT.

Donors who wish to learn about and support Camp Krem’s rebuild effort may do so by following these links:

- Camp Krem website: <https://campingunlimited.org/donate/>
- Merchandise fundraiser: <https://www.bonfire.com/store/camp-krem/>
- Camp Krem Facebook page: <https://facebook.com/campkrem1957>
- YouTube channel (which is full of LOTS of great videos of our happy campers and staff): <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC2MpgMB4-W20REKrup9UXDg/videos>
- Instagram: <https://instagram.com/camp.krem>

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WATER, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

efforts. Staff from both water districts agree there is the potential of substantial benefits by joining the two agencies.

“This is a collaborative effort to consider what is best for our customers, our water supply and our environment now and into the future,” SLVWD Manager Rick Rogers said. “It’s a good time to consider our options and have a conversation with the community.”

Added SVWD Manager Piret Harmon: “We think we have complementary strengths that are worth a public review for potential to benefit customers and employees of both districts. Specific benefits of merged operation could mean economies of scale, improved levels of customer service and more opportunities for employees.”

SLVWD and SVWD both draw water from the Santa

THE SVWD BOARD MEETS AT 6PM ON FEB. 11.

Join the meeting online: <https://global.gotomeeting.com/join/488730213> or call (646) 749-3122 and enter access code 488-730-213.

Margarita Groundwater Basin, a series of aquifers in the region. They also are connected through an intertie system, allowing them to share water during emergency situations.

The process of consolidation, which is facilitated by LAFCO, begins with an exploratory phase of at least one year that includes an analysis of both districts and input from a stakeholder group that includes representatives from both districts. If the feasibility study is favorable to consolidation, the districts can

apply for a change of governance with LAFCO. There would be multiple opportunities for public engagement and feedback, followed by a specified period during which customers would have an opportunity to support or oppose the proposal. Following public review, the two boards could only approve consolidation if it is not opposed by a majority of ratepayers.