

# Awaken the spirit at camp

By Lockie Hunter  
WNC Parent correspondent

Choosing a summer camp in Western North Carolina can be challenging. With so many options from soccer to farm camp, the offerings are varied. But some parents seek out an experience that goes beyond learning a secular skill, hoping also to foster spiritual growth in their child.

Adam Boyd, from Camps Merri-Mac and Timberlake, says “WNC is home to the strongest camps in the country, and there is a huge variety among them. Some are uniquely Christian, others are Jewish, competitive, noncompetitive, small, large, rustic or comfortable.”

## Spiritual aspects

Many choose religious-themed camps for their spiritual offerings.

Seth Kellam, Camp Ruach director at Asheville Jewish Community Center, said “our unique themes teach campers core Jewish values that emphasize respect for individuals and responsibility to the community as a whole.”

Boyd adds, “We are made to live



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**Campers at Camp Celo develop an appreciation for work as they learn to feed a calf.**

life together, and to be challenged, grow and succeed. Those things happen in a great camp and when they do, children from all backgrounds have the opportunity to experience something of what it means to be made in the image of God.”

Lutheridge’s Pastor Mary Caniff-Kuhn said, while “sitting around a

campfire on a starry night, with counselors and campers that you didn’t know a week ago, but now seem like family, God seems very near and very real, and all the ‘church talk’ about ‘brothers and sisters in Christ’ takes on a whole new meaning.”

## Secular themes

The camps often also include themes that cross over religious boundaries and into secular interests.

“Self-esteem and teamwork will be emphasized as well, but it will not be taught through drills and competition. For high school youth, it may be hiking 20 miles on the Appalachian Trail or putting a new roof on a Habitat cabin,” Caniff-Kuhn said.

Kellam said Camp Ruach strives to teach respect for nature through Jewish values “such as do not destroy (baltashit), to work and keep the land (l’ovdau’l’shomra), serving as guardians of the earth (shomreiadamah) and repairing the world (tikkunolam).”

## Respect for all religions

Most spiritual camps strive to be inclusive and respectful of all religious beliefs.

“While Celo is not a religious camp, our philosophy of simplicity, cooperation and nonviolence come directly from our roots in the Quaker faith,” said Gib Barrus, co-owner and director of Camp Celo in Burnsville. “There is a spiritual element to life at camp that focuses on the universal principles of compassion, cooperation, integrity, responsibility and service common to all major religions.”

Boyd adds that, “a Christian camp is inclusive in the same way as a family. Our campers do not come because we are a Christian camp. They come to have fun, to be a part of the camp tradition, to develop skills, make friends and to grow.”

“People of all backgrounds find the Christian community to be very welcoming and an inspiring place to make new friends and grow in faith,” said Mike Ward, vice president of advancement of Lutheridge.

Kellam adds, “all children, regardless of religious or cultural background, are welcome at Camp Ruach. The values of community, respect, teamwork and responsibility for others are specifically Jewish, but they are also universal.”

## 2 reads certain to capture tween campers’ attention

By Jennifer Prince  
WNC Parent contributor



Along with comfortable shoes, calamine lotion and a calling card, send your tween to camp with a great book. These two titles are quick, fun reads that are peppered with situations, conversations and people that reverberate with adolescent realities.

Veteran sports writer, Mike Lupica, writes a top-seeded book in “Summer Ball.” Thirteen-year old Danny is a basketball phenom. He led his team to the national championship. It was such a big deal that he and his teammates appeared on “Live with Regis and Kelly” and David Letterman’s show, and they went to the White House to meet the president. That

was last year.

Danny knows he cannot coast along on year-old glories, and he does not want to do that. However, he is the size of a 10 year old. At an age when his teammates are well along in their growth spurts, Danny’s growth is nil. With an elite NBA-sponsored basketball summer camp coming up, Danny wavers. Can he prove to himself and others that he can continue to excel?

Lupica’s writing has a rapid pulse. Danny’s summer speeds along like a ball in motion. Scenes are short and full of quick energy. Challenges arise, creating compelling suspense. First, through an administrative oversight, Danny is put in a cabin with the 11- and 12-year-olds. Then Danny discovers that the militaristic coach does not like him. Some of the players resent Danny’s past success so they try to show him up on court. Danny feigns a knee injury. As if his basketball trou-

bles aren’t enough, there are girl problems, too.

Lupica’s expert use of sports lingo and present-day cultural references add to the excitement and realism of the story.

The other tween title not to miss is Hope Larson’s “Chiggers.” A graphic novel, “Chiggers” tells the story of middle-schooler Abby who goes every year to the same summer camp (and it happens to be in Asheville). She is looking forward to it this year. Her same friends will be there, too.

Things change though, especially in the volatile middle school years. Abby’s friend have developed new interests. A new bunkmate, Shasta, does not proffer much in the way of

sane friendship. She has been struck by lightning, has an older, online boyfriend, and she is supposed to be taking prescription meds for a mysterious ailment but throws them away.

As the story pans out, Larson depicts middle-school girl life perfectly. There are misunderstandings that explode out of all recognizable proportion, and talk about crushes, periods, acne and haircuts. Larson’s dialogue resonates with truth.

Larson’s black-and-white illustrations are visually arresting and inventive. Interspersed with the straightforward depictions of the girls and their cabins, Larson weaves in fantastical and humorous elements.

These two titles are sure hits for tweens. Even if camp is not in your tween’s future, he or she will find something to like in these books.

