

RA Camp-O-Ree draws 660 to Linden Valley

By Connie Davis Bushey
Baptist and Reflector

LINDEN — About 660 Royal Ambassadors (RAs) and their leaders from four states gathered at Linden Valley Baptist Conference Center here Oct. 24-26 for the 36th annual RA Camp-O-Ree.

Most of the boys were a part of the Baptist missions education program for boys grades 1-12 which includes Challengers though some came who were not.

The RA Camp-O-Ree was held at Linden Valley for the first time. Previously it was held at Camp Cordova of the Mid-South Baptist Association, based in Bartlett. The camp facility has been sold.

Mike Freeman, director of the Camp-O-Ree, said he was thrilled at the turnout and the response to the new location.

He also is thankful for the support of the Tennessee Baptist Convention and the Mid-South Association, which made the use of Linden Valley possible, said Freeman, member of Whitten Memorial Baptist Church, Memphis, and member of Mid-South RAs, which directed the Camp-O-Ree.

Linden Valley is a much better facility for the Camp-O-Ree, said Freeman, who is a computer programmer for a financial institution in Memphis. Mid-South RAs could not have afforded it without the funding help. The TBC gave Cooperative

Program funds. Mid-South RAs worked with Frank Green, RA/Challenger ministry specialist, TBC, and Tim Bearden, senior manager, TBC conference centers to make the transition.

"We've seen God's hand in this. We just want boys to have an RA program that includes things like this," said Freeman.

"The Camp-O-Ree is made possible as churches partner together," he added. It is made possible "by dads and moms" that want to see RAs grow and by church members who want to "keep their program alive," said Freeman.

Herschel Wells, who was a part of the group of men in the Memphis area who started Camp-O-Ree 35 years ago, said he is still involved because of what he sees in the boys who participate.

They experience such joy as they succeed in competitions and meet missionaries, said Wells, a member of Second Baptist Church, Memphis. He is retired art director of the Brotherhood Commission, Memphis, where he served for 26 years. The commission, which supported RAs/Challengers, became a part of the North American Mission Board, Alpharetta, Ga. Wells became involved in RAs as he helped produce RA materials.

For this Camp-O-Ree Wells helped develop the live chat with missionaries in Afghanistan, Peru, Southeast Asia, Senegal, and the Philip-

pinas via the Internet. The live chat has been offered for several years. Wells noted the missionaries were willing to participate despite the fact that many had to participate in the middle of the night.

Wells said after the Camp-O-Ree he heard from the missionary in Southeast Asia who for security reasons is not identified. The missionary said many of the boys asked focused questions. He also noted that "it was through RAs that God first got my attention in the area of missions."

Wells and Freeman said that about 150 volunteers make the event possible. Many came from Gateway Baptist Church, Atoka, who has sent security workers for several years. This year the church sent about 35 volunteers and 24 RAs.

The Camp-O-Ree offered many activities including archery, BB guns, tomahawks, Survival-of-the-Fittest, high ropes, fishing, log sawing, wildlife demonstration, hot air balloon ride, compass course, rocketeering demonstration, night hike, and RA Racer competition.

RAs also competed in Bible drills and Missions Speak-Out, interacted with missionaries, and worshiped. Many camped out as part of the experience. □ — See pages 1 & 12 for more information.



DIRECTING THE RA Camp-O-Ree were, from left, Bob Smith, Trinity Baptist Church, Memphis; Herschel Wells, Second Baptist Church, Memphis; Mike Freeman, Whitten Memorial Baptist Church, Memphis; and Ken Cole, Ellendale Baptist Church, Bartlett. They all are a part of Mid-South RAs.



WADE AND NANCY WATTS pause with long-time friend Kenny Rains, right. The Watts of Bartlett were missionaries to Peru for 10 years before Wade was injured in a car accident. Prior to that Wade was a local and state RA worker. Rains is a former state RA director who is now of the North American Mission Board staff. He spoke at the RA Camp-O-Ree.

TBC concludes partnership with Baptists of ...

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Margrave credited the Dunns who are veteran medical team leaders for teaching everyone involved how to conduct clinics in Rio. In just the last three years, Tennessee Baptists have held 31 medical clinics in Rio.

But people made the partnership possible and Margrave mentioned a few who stood out in her memory for their sacrificial work.

- Ron Burney, a pharmacist of First Baptist Church, Kingston, provided and sent medicine for an ill baby in Rio for at least five years. The baby was seen in a partnership medical clinic.

- Konny and Dorothy Wiggins of Reed Springs Baptist Church, Philadelphia, served two years in Rio as long-term volunteers. They helped the Fairchilds as they worked with partnership teams.

- Inskip Baptist Church, Knoxville, and its pastor, Mike Segers, developed the idea of providing veterinary clinics and offered two in Rio. Other teams followed up on the ministry.

- The deaf ministry of Kirby Woods Baptist Church, Memphis, came up with the idea of ministering to deaf Brazilians and served four times.

- Tennessee Baptists helped develop a church and homeless

ministry in Lapa which was an answer to the prayers of Elizabeth Oates. The area is a downtown historic area of Rio which is a center for culture and the arts, explained Margrave. A building came up for sale which Baptists bought. It had been a warehouse, brothel, and pool hall. Members of Brentwood Baptist Church, Brentwood, removed 18 truck loads of trash from the building.

Members of Hermitage Hills Baptist Church, Old Hickory, and staff of the Tennessee Baptist Children's Homes also served in the development of the ministry.

Today the Lighthouse of Lapa, the name of the church, serves lunch to about 120 poor people each day. A physician and psychologist also serve the needy through the church's ministry.

- Betty Wiseman, athletic director of Belmont University, Nashville, led five teams of athletes to Rio where they used sports as a witness. Wiseman also served on two teams of her church, Brentwood Baptist Church.

- A member of a team serving at Lapa felt the call to missions. She was studying the treatment of autism at a university in Nashville. She began serving in eastern Europe in missions even

though her family didn't understand her call.

- The first chapel built in the partnership was constructed in 1998 by a team developed by the Tennessee Baptist Foundation, Brentwood, in the Rio de Pedros community.

Margrave recalled that the building in which the small congregation was meeting was "falling apart around them" and the community could only be reached by way of a dirt road.

She re-visited the community on her final trip to Rio for the partnership. The community has developed and Second Baptist Church is "the center of the community." Also the Brazilian Baptists have added two floors to the original facility.

- Tennessee Woman's Missionary Union sent several teams and gifts for the Missionary Learning Center of the Rio Baptist convention. Team members have renovated areas of the center, worked on the media center, and developed the Elizabeth Oates memorial prayer garden.

- When Sharon Fairchild began serving with the partnership in 1998, she knew of 20 Brazilians who could serve as translators for English speakers. Since then she has developed a team of over 600 translators. Many have become Christians as

a result of spending time with Tennessee Baptists, said Fairchild, and some have even become foreign missionaries.

- Many churches have been started in Rio as a result of the medical clinics and crusades and other evangelism-focused events. And churches have been started intentionally. First Baptist Church, Clarksville, and Moneró Baptist Church, which is located on Governor's Island, started a church.

- For the partnership Ray Fairchild developed a method for Baptist volunteers from the U.S. to witness through a translator. He still trains volunteers to use that method of witnessing, he said.

General comments

Ray Fairchild said of the partnership, "The greatest joy I have is to see a volunteer learn how to share Christ, see people come to saving faith, and later hear them say they are witnessing and leading people to Christ back in the U.S."

Ray and Sharon Fairchild will be honored at the TBC annual meeting Nov. 11-12 at First Baptist Church, Hendersonville, for their role in the partnership. The Fairchilds will retire Dec. 31, 2008, after 27 years of missionary service. They will live in Brentwood.

James Porch noted that "each of my journeys to Rio graced my life with the increasing reality people do respond to those who go with the gospel and allow the Holy Spirit to mightily act through them. The Rio partnership will continue to build the kingdom of God as seeds sown through Tennessee Baptist ministry gain the nurture of the Living Christ in the hearts of the people and the ministries of new churches."

Porch expressed gratitude for the thousands of Tennessee Baptists who participated in the Rio partnership.

"Some volunteers are known only to the Lord and the churches from where they came," he observed. "Their efforts and ministry in the name of our Lord have not been in vain," he stressed, adding that volunteers are the essential key behind any successful missions partnership.

Margrave said being involved in the partnership was "life changing" and was "certainly a faith walk in many ways." She added that the partnership was "a great example of the Cooperative Program at work as local churches and associations and a state convention partnered with national agencies and all were impacted by a church's gifts to the Cooperative Program." □