Camp Eden Wood celebrates 100 years of life-changing experiences

Event set for Sept. 9 features live music, tours

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(SUBMITTED PHOTO)

Sign at the entrance of True Friends Camp Eden Wood site.

Eden Prairie residents and surrounding community members are invited to help celebrate the milestone at Camp Eden Wood.

The 100-year celebration is scheduled for 5:30-7:30 p.m. Sept. 9 at 6350 Indian Chief Road.

John LeBlanc, president and CEO of True Friends — an Eden Prairie-based nonprofit and managing partner of Camp Eden Wood said True Friends is the result of the merging of two legacy camp organizations for people with disabilities: Camp Courage and Camp Friendship.

True Friends' goal is to provide life-changing experiences aimed to enhance independence and self-esteem for families with children and adults with disabilities. Some of its programs include, but are not limited to: camp, respite, therapy and adaptive riding. It serves over 25,000 individuals yearly, according to True Friends' website.

HISTORY

Camp Eden Wood's roots in the Eden Prairie community run deep.

Leonora and George Christianson were parents to a son who died of tuberculosis in the early 1900s. In 1925, following their son's passing, the couple made a donation to help construct Glen Lake Children's Camp, serving children with tuberculosis.

However, the camp eventually closed in 1950, according to True Friends' website.

Camp Courage was established in 1955, providing an accessible camp environment and experience to individuals with physical disabilities.

In 1957, following the establishment of Camp Courage, Hennepin County renamed the former Glen Lake Children's Camp property to Camp Indian Chief and operated a day facility for individuals with developmental disabilities.

Camp Indian Chief eventually closed in 1983 due to the change of ownership to the city of Eden Prairie. The site was then renamed Camp Eden Wood.

Camp Friendship opened in 1964 after a group of parents with ARC of Minnesota bought a resort on Clearwater Lake to create a residential camp for their children with developmental disabilities.

Camp Courage North was established in 1971 after a St. Paul couple donated their 95-acre lake home on Lake George to the Courage Center.

Friendship Ventures, an independent non-profit organization that was established in 1986, took over ownership of Camp Eden Wood from the City of Eden Prairie after expanding its services to the Twin Cities metro area. It later also acquired Camp Courage and Camp Courage North in 2012. True Friends became the organization's official name in October 2013.

PROGRAMMING

Children and adults attending Camp Eden Wood have a plethora of programs to choose from.

Camp Eden Wood offers Five-, six- and 10-day camp sessions throughout the year at three camp locations across Minnesota owned by True Friends. Campers choose their desired activities and level of participation. With this opportunity, campers develop new skills, discover new interests and enjoy a traditional camp experience.

"Campers get to come and be themselves," LeBlanc said. "It's a place where they can let their hair

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(SUBMITTED PHOTOS)

LEFT: True Friends President and CEO John LeBlanc spending time with a camper during the 2025 camp season. **RIGHT:** Camper enjoying games and activities at Camp Eden Wood.

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down. It's a place where they can feel free and do what they want within reason."

Camp Eden Wood offers weekday and weekend respite programs tailored to the needs of each individual family. Activities include arts and crafts, archery, basketball, biking, volleyball, offsite trips and more.

A retreat program is also available for small and large group use of any kind. Whether it be university students or a team of employees, over 300 groups have participated in a retreat at one of the four available Minnesota camp locations. Everything from weddings, team building opportunities and camping experiences are available.

LeBlanc described Camp Eden Wood as "one of Eden Prairie's best-kept secrets," noting many residents don't even know of its existence or its long history of contributions to the city.

"If you have a kid with very high care needs, you've got parents who could never imagine that someone else would or could take care of their kid as good as they can," LeBlanc said. "[The kids] need to eventually be given the independence to be on their own away from their parents. Everyone deserves that too. Because their parents aren't going to be around forever."

EVENT DETAILS

The centennial celebration is hosted in partnership with the Eden Prairie Historical Society and the Eden Prairie Lions Club. Mayor Ron Case and Historical Society President Kathie Case will lead the event.

Admission is free. A complimentary meal will be served, drinks will be available for purchase, and guests can enjoy live music and tours of the 51-acre camp on Birch Island Lake.

Camp Eden Wood asks that guests RSVP to the event. Please visit bit.ly/422v7Re.

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