

THE ENDLESS SUMMER

A camp owner for more than three decades, Howard Batterman may well have discovered his fountain of youth.

By Avery Greene



Summer vacation is a year-round job for Howard Batterman, who has been running camps with his wife, Dale, for three decades. And they're still going strong, thank you. They currently own and oversee Diamond Ridge Camps in Jamison and Sesame/Rockwood Day Camps and Rockwood Adventures Teen Travel in Blue Bell, Montgomery County.

Deep in the throes of another hyperactive season, Batterman muses about how art doesn't imitate life in the wilderness and why smartphones are a dumb idea for campers.

In the movies, summer camps usually involve food fights, a deranged killer, young romance and aliens. Any of that ring a bell?

Here's my reality: Long gone is the question, *So, what do you do over the winter?* Plenty. From planning and marketing, to purchasing and recruiting campers, to hiring staff and programming, we are busy. During the summer, I usually arrive by 6:15 a.m. and leave for home after the evening phone calls to parents at about 9 p.m. And we're rarely in an office.

How did you get into this line of work?

I was a middle school teacher in the early '70s in the Neshaminy School District before making camp a full-time profession.

Let's say I'm the mother of a 15-year-old princess who never sets foot in the woods. Sell me on a week at Diamond Ridge.

The beauty of this particular day camp is not its wooded, 33-acre site, nor

is it the Morris Creative Arts Center, nor the Manny Recreational Hall (both named after our father and father-in-law), nor the huge dining hall, nor the terrific ball fields, hockey courts, basketball and tennis courts, culinary arts and digital photography programs, nor the swimming pool, but in its rich and long history of being a children's camp.

Somewhere about 85 years ago, Diamond Ridge was formally known as Camp Tel Hai, a day camp for primarily Jewish children from Philadelphia and the surrounding communities. Then, 40 or so years later, the Archdiocese of Philadelphia purchased the site to continue as both an overnight and day camp for primarily Catholic families.

How well do the campers segue from texting and Tweeting to crafts and campfires?

Our camps are one big social network, but without the electronics and technology. It's refreshing for the children, as well as the staff, not to be bothered with cell phones, online chatting or MP3 players. Keep the devices home for a positive time without distraction. It's camp policy for both the campers and the staff.

Summer camps have undergone a pretty dramatic evolution in recent years. Has it been for the better?

It's changed over the last decade with the increase of sports, dance, business and arts camps. But, anyone can teach swimming and how to hit a ball, for example. We want to dig deeper into the heart and feelings of the campers. Friends happen at Diamond Ridge.