

Washington Jewish Week

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Camps&Schools

Five minutes with Lee D. Weiss



The new year brought a new chair of the board of directors for the Foundation for Jewish Camp (FJC). Lee D. Weiss, who has been an active member of the board since 2007, took the position last month. I spoke with the Potomac resident to learn about his personal camp experiences and his goals for the FJC.

Where did you attend camp growing up? I was a scholarship kid so I attended whichever camp was able to offer my siblings and I a chance to go. I was a camper at Camp Blue Star and Camp Judea and a counselor at Camp Ramah in New England.

What is your favorite memory from camp? As a counselor, I was with my *eidah* (division) at Camp Ramah at a Shabbat service looking over the lake. It was perfect weather and the perfect moment. All the *ruach* was there and the kids were wonderfully participating and excited to be there it was a special moment.

What advice do you have for parents who are deciding where to send their kids? They should definitely send their kids to a Jewish nonprofit summer camp because it adds a lot of interesting aspects when it's a mission-based camp. When deciding where to send your kid, there are a lot of variables to consider, including what type and amount of religious experience you want your child to have; what activities your child is interested in, whether it be sports, arts, photography, camping overnights etc.; and also whether your kid will have friends that are going and will there be a natural congregation of children that your child would have a good experience with.

How did you get involved with the FJC? The previous CEO of FJC is a close personal friend, and we were talking about our camp memories and I explained to him how when I was able to, I began a scholarship at my synagogue so kids could attend summer camp. He asked me if I wanted to get more active with the FJC on a national level and join the board, and I was very excited to do so.

What are your plans as the new chair of the board? You know, we took the last five

years to prove that Jewish camps deserve to be a centerpiece in the Jewish world and that the camping experience is valid in creating a Jewish identity. These next five years we're going to focus on four pillars including camper acquisition, or how we can expand the types of campers that come to our camps. We plan to do this in part by creating specialty camps and making camps more affordable in general. Also on high priority are program excellence to make each camp better, making sure that we create a place where our campers not only make friends but are immersed in Jewish and Israeli content; leadership development, creating more communication between camp leadership and the board so they can work together to help create more camps and expand existing ones; and community engagement and making camp a year-long experience instead of just from June-August.

What is the best advice you've ever been given?

Start with the end in mind. Whenever you start a project or a strategy, if you always have an end goal defined and determined it makes all the steps in between much more achievable. — by Emily Jacobs