

# A Tree (House) Grows at Camp Twin Lakes

by Steve Hurwitz, Arboguard Tree Specialists Communications

In north-central Georgia, about 50 miles east of Atlanta, sits the historic city of Rutledge. With just 700 residents the city's motto is "small but special." It's fitting that Camp Twin Lakes (CTL) is just up the road. Located on 500 acres, this not-for-profit organization offers year-round recreational, therapeutic, and educational programs for children facing serious illnesses and other physical, emotional and life challenges. Camp Twin Lakes provides life-changing experiences for thousands of children each year at this state-of-the-art, fully accessible facility, and at other locations throughout the state.

Camp Twin Lakes focuses on building confidence, self reliance and self esteem by encouraging its campers to experience life and nature through proactive participation in the many activities available there. Nature trails, kayaking, climbing walls and pools are a small sample of the opportunities for campers to enjoy.



Now, there's an important addition—the Camp Twin Lakes Tree House. Located adjacent to the upper lake, it's accessible to all and can accommodate groups of campers for nature study, arts and crafts, meetings and just plain fun among the trees.

The idea was the vision of Cynthia Gentry, founder of the Atlanta Task Force on Play, who recognized that there was a greater need for children with challenges to spend time in closer proximity with nature.

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One classic experience of childhood is a visit to a tree house. They offer an opportunity to see and feel things from a different perspective, but the experience isn't always available to children who are differently abled.

In 2007, CTL began by consulting with experts in the field of childhood play structures: the children themselves. Design days were held at various camps throughout the summer. A careful analysis of the children's drawings guided the work of the architects tasked with designing the most extraordinary tree house ever built.

A design competition was held at the architectural firm of Lord, Aeck and Sargent, and the winning design was selected by a team of judges that included campers.

Many volunteers, organizations and companies contributed to the successful completion of the tree house. One of the first was Arborguard Tree Specialists, the Atlanta-based tree preservation company. David Dechant, senior arborist, was responsible for choosing the single tree that was to become the focus of the entire project—a sturdy 24-inch white oak.

Construction began in 2008 with the setting of support poles and footings. By then, Arborguard was figuring out how to save trees along the ADA-compliant trailways, ramps and in the construction zone. An air spade was used to carefully expose the roots of the central oak, which were then surgically hand pruned. "Although located in the middle of a forest, the tree house project required the same tree care and preservation as in any urban

construction setting. Whenever and wherever earth is disturbed and heavy equipment is used, trees are in danger. Our job is to protect these irreplaceable assets," said Spence Rosenfeld, founder and president of Arborguard.

The children who visit the camp can now enjoy a day living in, playing and learning among the trees. Dan Mathews, CTL's director summed it up: "When we were kids we spent so much time in the woods. For too long, children with limited mobility have had to sit on the sidelines and imagine what it was like. Now they can be a part of it—live it, and experience for themselves the joy and wonder of it all!" ■

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