

Camp regulators size up summer safety, fun

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One are the days of shipping children off to summer camps organized by teenagers who carry clipboards and pacify rambunctious campers with gallons of Kool-Aid.

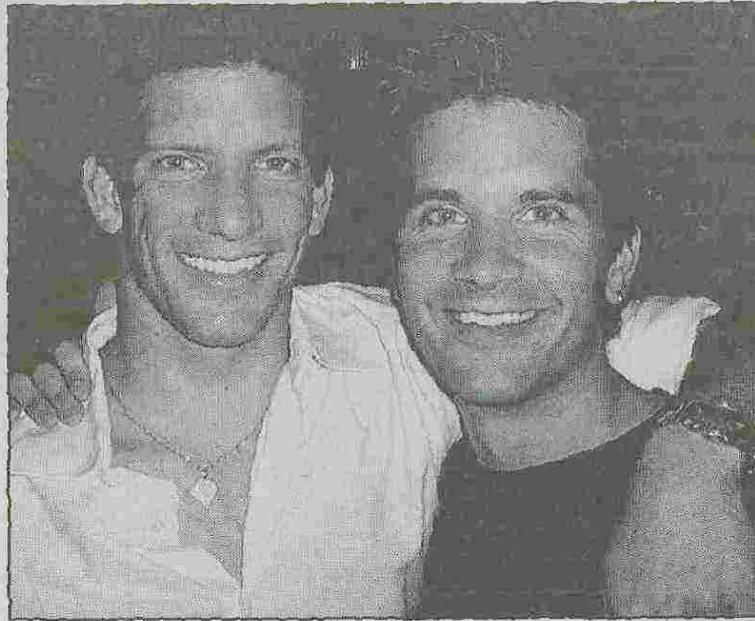
According to David Hughes, director of Mill Valley's Camp Doodles, parents start researching summer camps as early as January and are looking for programs that will provide their children with fun, educational, healthy and innovative summer experiences.

"Parents are looking for a home away from home," said Hughes, who has run Camp Doodles since it opened in 2001.

One gauge they can use is accreditation from the American Camp Association, the only inde-

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— David Hughes



courtesy photo

Camp Doodles Director David Hughes, shown here with his brother Jeremy, says accreditation from the American Camp Association has helped boost his camp's success.

pendent accrediting organization reviewing camp operations in the country. The organization's standards are continually reviewed, refined and updated, and accreditation, which is voluntary, is a comprehensive process.

According to the ACA, more than 10 million adults and children attend day camps like Camp Doodles, but Doodles is among only five camps in Marin County that have met or exceeded the ACA's inspection of more than 30 program-quality, health and safety standards. The other four

are the Marin YMCA Day Camp, Osher Marin JCC Day Camp, Bothin in Fairfax and YMCA Point Bonita in Sausalito.

Nationally, only 25 percent of day and resident camps attain ACA-accredited status.

At Camp Doodles, Hughes' day job as an elementary school teacher and his volunteer work for the Red Cross have opened his eyes to a strict priority for "safety first." Besides the ACA accreditation, he credits the camp's qualified staff, age-

appropriate activities, and clean and secure facilities for its success.

And it doesn't hurt that Hughes grew up in Mill Valley and formerly worked summers at various day camps in the area.

"By being ACA-accredited, Camp Doodles demonstrates that it cares about its campers and complies with the highest-quality standards designed specifically for camps," said Pat Hammond, director of ACA's standards program. "Parents expect their children to attend accredited schools. They also deserve a camp experience that is reviewed and accredited by an expert, independent organization."

"Parents do want safety first, and that is what the accreditation process is about," Hughes said.

ACA's opinion research reveals:

Parents see fun and safety as most important to the camp experience.

Parents have very definite perceptions of the value of camp for their children, believing developmental value is important — social and emotional growth — but this is secondary to providing their children with safe and secure facilities, along with positive and fun activities.

Parents were also surprised to learn that there is no government oversight of camps; they

assumed that because camps involved children that some form of regulation was taking place.

Most parents did not know that ACA accreditation was voluntary.

Camp Doodles is located in Mill Valley and operates from mid-June to mid-August. For more information, parents can contact the camp at 388-4386, or visit the camp's Web site at www.campdoodles.com.

For a listing of ACA-accredited camps in Northern California, call 453-1832.

The American Camp Association judges camps on numerous criteria to determine if they should be accredited. The standards cover the following categories, where applicable:

- Site and food service
- Transportation
- Health and wellness
- Operational management
- Human resources
- Program design and activities
- Aquatics program
- Adventure challenge program
- Horseback riding program
- Trip and travel program