

HEALTHY LIVING

‘Campers first... Tourette’s second’

Kids with neurological disorder find friends, fun all week in Georgia

BY SHANE BLATT

Special To Florida Weekly

Just three days into summer camp, and Amanda Smith is ready to rattle off what she likes.

Swimming. Singing. Dancing. Tree climbing.

And boys.

After a day of physical activities, the 10-year-old said she and her friends like to return to their cabins to do and talk “girl stuff.”

That’s hair, makeup — and Max.

“I have a crush on an 18-year-old. He knows, but says we can only be friends,” said a smiling Amanda, clad in a football

jersey with pink trim.

Such is life at the weeklong camp for youngsters like Amanda, who has Tourette’s syndrome.

Camp Twitch and Shout in Winder, Ga., boasts 50 campers with varying degrees of the neurological disorder known for its involuntary movements and vocal sounds, called tics.

Youngsters with Tourette’s have come to Georgia from as far as New York and California and range in age from 7 to 18.

Activities — from canoeing and kayaking to archery and arts and crafts — are held at the 53-acre Camp Will-A-Way, a new addition to Atlanta-based Camp Twin Lakes. For 17 summers, Camp



Katie Stapleton, above left, launches Mason Loggins in a kayak at Camp Twitch and Shout in Winder, Ga.



PHIL SKINNER / COX NEWSPAPERS

Brad Cohen, left, and Jimmy Wolk, the actor who played Cohen in a TV movie, teach tree climbing at Camp Twitch and Shout. Cohen organized the weeklong camp.

Twin Lakes has served kids with special needs.

Brad Cohen, an educator whose life with Tourette’s was chronicled in a television movie last year, is camp director. He’s quick to point out that Twitch and Shout is about having fun, not dwelling on the disorder.

“We don’t sit around and talk about Tourette’s,” he said. “This isn’t therapy. This isn’t a doctor’s office. It’s not school. We just come here and let them do camp activities ... just be kids.”

And by engaging with others with Tourette’s, campers realize they’re not alone, said Cohen.

“We all know we have a disability,” Mr. Cohen said. “We have a disability because the rest of the world thinks we have one. The reality is, these kids can do anything they want.”

Gil Berman, 16, of Sandy Springs, Ga., wants to be a comedian.

“I’ve always loved making people laugh. It’s a great feeling,” said Mr. Berman, who came to camp straight from an improv performance in downtown Atlanta.

Actor Jimmy Wolk, who played Cohen in “Front of the Class” on CBS, flew from California to volunteer. “When Brad told he was doing this, I booked my ticket,” he said.

A camp counselor growing up, Mr. Wolk and others showed the youngsters the ropes as they climbed 35 feet up a tree. He said he was excited to see them soar.

Rhett Sewell, who’s one of the camp’s 30 volunteers, said Twitch and Shout hits close to his heart.

“I have Tourette’s syndrome as well, so it really touches home,” said Mr. Sewell, 18, of Newnan, Ga. “We’ve been treating them as campers first, kids with Tourette’s second.”

Ken Frazier, 14, of Powder Springs, Ga., has been to a Tourette’s camp before in Chicago. He is drawn to archery and swimming, as well as kayaking — up until he fell out of the boat.

Mr. Frazier finds Twitch and Shout relaxing and spacious, but he does have a camp criticism. “They need to supply everyone with bug spray.” ■

Tourette’s Syndrome

• **What it is:** Disorder characterized by involuntary, sudden movements and/or vocal outbursts.

• **The symptoms:** May include blinking, head jerking, throat clearing and clicking, among others.

• **How many have it:** About 200,000 in the United States, though it can be difficult to diagnose.

• **The cursing:** It is a common misconception that everyone with Tourette’s utters obscenities. Only a small percent-

age affected with Tourette’s have this symptom.

• **Treatment:** There is no cure, but medications are available to help control symptoms.

• **For children:** Tourette’s doesn’t affect a child’s intelligence, but it can make learning more difficult. Some people afflicted by Tourette’s have difficulty reading or writing. Additionally, some with Tourette’s may also have obsessive-compulsive disorder. ■

— Source: Tourette’s Syndrome Association

Online service holds your spot at the hospital

BY SHEILA M. POOLE

Special To Florida Weekly

Have you ever made an online reservation at your favorite restaurant? What if you could do the same for an emergency room visit?

Tyler Kiley, a 23-year-old entrepreneur, has applied a practice used by the restaurant industry as a remedy to long waits at hospitals. Two years ago, Mr. Kiley launched InQuickER, an online service that lets users hold their places in line in the emergency room.

It may help. Health-care experts say hospital emergency rooms are facing a number of pressures, including more patients and more closings. Between 1994 and 2004, U.S. visits to the ER increased an estimated 18 percent to 26 percent, while the number of emergency departments decreased between 9 percent and 12 percent, according to a report in Health Affairs.

Both contribute to longer wait times. Based

on a 2007 report by Press Ganey Associates, the average time spent in U.S. emergency rooms was 240 minutes, although other reports put it much lower.

“What’s frustrating is when you don’t know how long is the wait,” Mr. Kiley said. “... We want to give patients two things: time and certainty.”

InQuickER guarantees its customers will be seen by a physician or physician’s assistant within 15 minutes of the specified time. If not (and if the correct information is given online), there is no charge to you or your insurance company for the visit.

Here’s how it works: People go to the company’s Web site, which shows the next available time at the closest hospital that uses the service. Users are then directed to a page where they describe their symptoms. The reserved time is usually determined by the charge nurse, who factors in current patient load, time of day and ambulance runs.

The cost is \$24.99 per use.

So far, three hospitals use the system, including Emory-Adventist Hospital in Smyrna, Ga.

The service isn’t for everyone. If you have symptoms consistent with a stroke or heart attack, Mr. Kiley advises people to call 911.

An official at Emory-Adventist, an 88-bed hospital, said it’s helped the ER become more efficient.

And there’s an added benefit.

“The biggest selling point for nurses is that the patients are happy. That’s just something not seen in the emergency room,” said Brandon Dickey, director of the hospital’s emergency department, which sees about 23,000 patients annually.

Mr. Dickey said the hospital has more than 1,000 visits through InQuickER, with 11 percent repeat users. An average ER wait during busy hours (10 a.m. to 10 p.m.) is between two and three hours.

An Internet programmer by profession, Mr. Kiley knew other industries were using the Inter-

net and reservation systems. “I said, ‘Why don’t we expand this to a field where it’s really, really needed?’”

The service “is not a moneymaker for the hospital but a money saver,” said Mr. Kiley, who says he was more interested in solving a problem than financial gain.

The service is not without some detractors.

Dr. Arthur Kellerman, professor of emergency medicine and associate dean for health policy at Emory University’s School of Medicine, understands the issues facing emergency rooms, such as overcrowding, long wait times and other inefficiencies.

“If you’re well enough to call and plug in a 10 a.m. time to be seen, why are you going to the emergency department and not your primary care physician?” said Dr. Kellerman, an attending physician at Grady Hospital in Atlanta. “That’s really not what emergency departments are supposed to be for.” ■