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MALIBU LIFE

Camp Bloomfield's family honored for longtime commitment

By Meagan McCrary / Special to The Malibu Times

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The Bloomfield family's 50-year commitment to providing blind, visually impaired and multidisabled youth with a safe, outdoor recreational experience at Junior Blind of America's Camp Bloomfield in Malibu was recognized during the Los Angeles Dodgers' Disability Awareness Night on June 4.

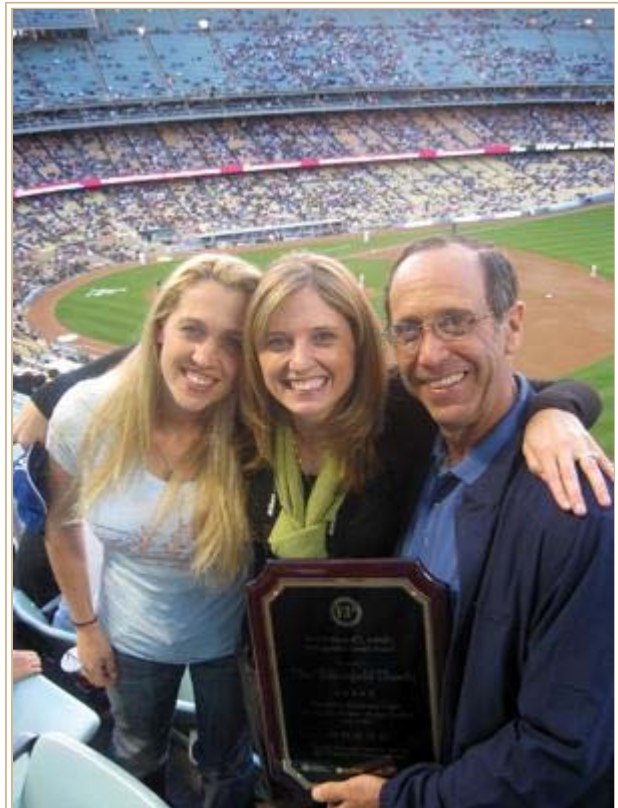
"This honor is a way of acknowledging a thread of life that has passed through my family for generations and still remains alive today," Mike Bloomfield, camp manager for the past 20 years, said. "To be a part of such a wonderful organization as the Junior Blind of America is truly an honor for me. I am able to help keep and continue my grandfather's legacy."

His grandfather was real estate monger Henry Bloomfield, who moved to Southern California following the market crash of the 1920s, and in 1958 purchased 40 acres of land in the Santa Monica Mountains above Malibu. Not long after, Camp Bloomfield was born-the first camp of its kind to be specifically designed for children who were blind.

The vision to provide blind and visually impaired children with an authentic summer camp experience began when Henry stumbled upon Junior Blind of America while strolling down Santa Monica Boulevard in the mid-1950s, meeting the nonprofit's founder, Norm Kaplan. At the time, the budding organization was experiencing financial difficulties, and Henry, recognizing the value of providing all children, despite their handicaps, with recreational opportunities, immediately stepped in to become one of the organization's most significant supporters.

"My grandfather was larger than life. He was a good family man, and the most significant thing he taught me was how important family is; to watch your children grow and interact in loving and jovial ways is a gift," Mike said. "I think it's why I am so committed to helping give all children the opportunities they deserve in life."

Founded in 1953, Junior Blind of America (formerly known as Foundation for the Junior Blind) was developed to help blind, visually impaired, and multidisabled children and adults develop skills, build confidence and achieve independence. Prior to Camp Bloomfield, the nonprofit bounced from one summer camp to the next, never finding an environment that fit the unique needs of the organization's children.



Pictured from left: Spring Ambriz, Cherie Astruggarrd with their father Mike Bloomfield. Photo by Melissa Reskof

"My grandfather promised the kids [from Junior Blind] he would find a permanent camp for them," Mike said.

Having learned about Junior Blind of America as a young child, the now camp manager began working at Camp Bloomfield in 1984, moving onsite with his wife and seven children. More than a job, the camp and its campers became a part of his life, and he has lived there ever since.

"Then, and now, I felt my role was to care for the camp and make sure it provided the best environment for the kids," Mike said. (His sister, Jackie Stein, volunteers at the Junior Blind's Los Angeles campus in the nonprofit adult rehabilitation program teaching Pilates to newly blind adults who are working to regain their independence.)

The largest sleep-away camps dedicated to children who are blind and visually impaired in the Western United States, Camp Bloomfield offers typical activities found at summer camp: horseback riding, archery, sea kayaking, fishing, hiking, martial arts, rope courses, arts and crafts, and, of course, camp fires. Participants learn teamwork, develop decision-making skills, and gain independence—returning to the sighted world with a greater sense of confidence.

Each year, the Bloomfield Foundation makes a significant grant in support of Junior Blind's Camp Bloomfield, which is free to all participants and their families with the help of additional grants and donations. A year-round residential camp, Camp Bloomfield (made up of 40 camp counselors who undergo intensive training to meet the needs of all participants) has been home and family for thousands of blind, visually impaired, multidisabled children for more than 50 years.

"Our future is bright, and with the help of those who see our vision of inspiration, independence and friendship, we will continue for many years to come," Mike said.

The 40-acre camp is located at 35375 Mulholland Highway, off Pacific Coast Highway near Leo Carrillo State Beach. More information about Camp Bloomfield and Junior Blind of America can be found online at juniorblind.org