



Junior Blind of America, which serves the visually impaired and blind, is celebrating 50 years of its Camp Bloomfield in Malibu on Saturday.

Junior Blind of America celebrates 50 years in Malibu

The organization, which helps visually impaired and blind children and adults achieve independence, is having a summer festival on Saturday, designed to educate sighted persons and promote sensitivity to people who typically regard their blindness as just another way of going about life.

By Melonie Magruder
Special to The Malibu Times

This Saturday, the Junior Blind of America will celebrate the 50th anniversary of its Camp Bloomfield in Malibu

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SHIRLY MANNING
DIRECTOR OF ADULT EDUCATION
THE JUNIOR BLIND OF AMERICA

with a summer festival, which is open to the public. The festival pays tribute to the visionary generosity of Henry Bloomfield, the transplanted Indianan who offered a 40-acre campground up in the Santa Monica Mountains to children who were vi-

sually impaired.

Along with Norm Kaplan, founder of the Junior Blind of America, Bloomfield fulfilled a goal of creating an outdoor summer experience for thousands of visually impaired children since 1958, offering typical

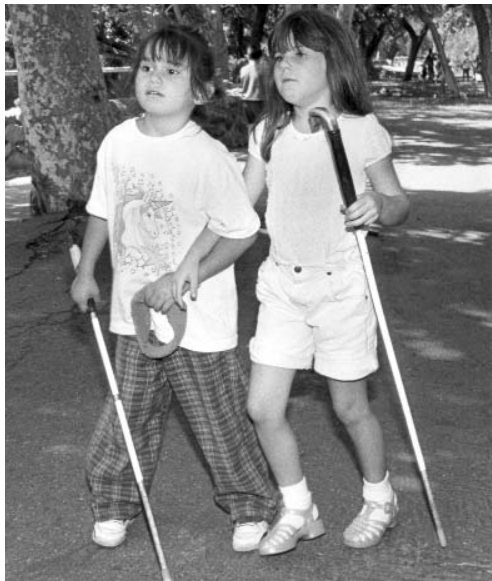
summer camp activities that sighted youngsters take for granted, such as archery, horseback riding and wall climbing.

Shirley Manning, director of adult education for the Junior Blind of America, spent several summers at Camp Bloomfield as a child.

"The most important thing Camp Bloomfield taught me was to question what sighted people expected I could do," said Manning, who has been blind since birth. "Society has a pretty dim view, no pun intended,



Henry Bloomfield, a transplant from Indiana, donated a 40-acre campground up in the Santa Monica Mountains to children who were visually impaired. The Organization Junior Blind of America will pay homage to Bloomfield on Saturday. The public is invited to attend the festivities.



Campers at Camp Bloomfield in the past

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Manning said Camp Bloomfield was the highlight of her summer every year from 1965 to 1974.

"I became a horse nut and learned how to saddle and groom my horse," she said.

The experience gave her enough confidence to eventually buy her own horse.



Camp Bloomfield offers a range of activities and games for children to enjoy

"It was such a valuable experience because we did normal camp stuff and I was just another kid," Manning said. "I wasn't 'the blind girl.'"

This year, the Junior Blind of America is opening its doors to visitors in a festival designed to educate sighted persons and promote sensitivity to people who typically regard their blindness as just another way of going about life.

Activities will include a Blindness Discovery Area, Captain Carl's Mobile Tide Pool, games and prizes, and

a lunchtime show featuring a barbecue and homage to the Bloomfield family.

Communications manager for the Junior Blind, Camille Wheatley, said the event is free and she encourages the community to come enjoy the campgrounds and "see what it's like to be blind."

"We'll have different demonstrations, like the Juno Walk," Wheatley said. "It's a simulation where sighted people will be blindfolded then led with a harness, like those used by guide



Photo by Leslie Barton

Grej, a sophomore in high school, lost his vision at age eight due to a genetic eye condition.



Skylar, age 5, at Camp Bloomfield. She has been blind since birth.

dogs. It's a terrific way to learn orientation and mobility."

As the years have passed, adaptive technology has progressed such that visually impaired people can program computer software and "read" pretty much everything with integrated voice synthesizers.

"At the festival, you'll be able to see campers who read and translate Braille," Wheatley said. "But we have a lot of computer technology, like Zoom Text, and other programs."

Camp Bloomfield does not charge fees for its camp sessions, relying exclusively on donations and grants.

Until he died in 1989, founder Kaplan was deeply involved in the summer camp sessions, frequently teaching blind youngsters himself how to swim.

"Norm started Junior Blind, basically, in his back yard," Manning said. "He knew that camp experiences led to life lessons."

Former camper Veronica Rash recalled, "I remember my first day at Camp Bloomfield when I was six. I spilled a whole tray of peas and carrots down my front, and was terrified I'd be in trouble. Norm just picked me up, gave me one of his big shirts to wear while my clothes were being washed and told me that I would be OK and that everyone learned from accidents like this."

Rash met her husband, Tom, who is totally blind, through the Junior Blind Foundation and they both became counselors at Camp Bloomfield in 1985. The couple has five children now, two who are partially sighted.

"Camp Bloomfield was such a confidence builder for me," Rash said. "Love was spoken there. You learn that you can do anything sighted people can do, but with different approaches."

The Rashes usually enjoy one of the "Family Camp" weeks Camp Bloomfield offers every summer.

"We swim, ride, do archery, arts and crafts or just hang around the cabin," Rash said. "It's great family time."

This Saturday's events, from 10 a.m. till 2 p.m., will provide a host of activities for more than 500 expected campers and their families, and a chance for the general public to appreciate the different approach to life taken by visually impaired people.

"You have to be an advocate for yourself," Manning said. "I learned how to cook and sew at Camp Bloomfield, and they are skills I use to this day. However, my mother still can't be in the same room with me when I'm using an electric sewing machine."

Camp Bloomfield is located at 35375 Mulholland Hwy., off Pacific Coast Highway, near Leo Carrillo Beach. More information can be obtained by contacting Debbie McBeth at 323.295. 4555 ext. 267 or by emailing, dmcbeth@juniorblind.org