



DOUBLE H RANCH

— Fun in the Foothills

By Richard W. Crannell Jr.

If you think a wheelchair-bound child with muscular dystrophy can't hit an archery target, think again. Maybe you haven't seen the kind of problem-solving the staff at Double H Ranch can muster when kids' happiness is at stake. All you need to do is to set up a shooting bench at wheelchair height, fasten the bow horizontally, insert an arrow, let the child pull the string back, and watch the smile as the arrow hits home.

Twenty years ago, actor Paul Newman and amusement park pioneer Charley Wood began a collaborative effort that today benefits more than 2,000 children and their families each year; 70% of whom come from New York State. Paul's vision and Charley's persistence (everyone at Double H goes by his/her first name) led to the opening of Double H Ranch in Lake Luzerne.

Paul had previously founded The Hole in the Wall Gang Camp in Ashford, Connecticut in 1988 for the purpose of letting children with life-threatening illnesses "raise a little hell." Charley had made his fortune in amusement parks and wanted to give back to children who needed a more specialized camp environment.

Although Paul was busy with his camp in Connecticut, Charley went to New York City to pursue his desire to establish a similar camp near his home.

George Hodgson Jr.



Archery is just one of the fun activities that children with life-threatening illnesses (like the one pictured here and the other one described in the opening paragraph) get to experience at the Double H Ranch.

Initially, Charley wished to donate his land on Lake George, but Paul considered it too steep for wheelchairs. Through good fortune, however, an existing ranch—Hidden Valley Dude Ranch on 320 acres overlooking Lake Vanare—was auctioned and the two men donated \$1,000,000 each to purchase it and get it operating.



The camp's founders: Paul Newman and Charley Wood.

The name—Double H Hole in the Woods Ranch—came from Charley’s fondness for toasting health and happiness (two “Hs”), along with a strong nod to Paul’s Connecticut camp. Interestingly, as workers were preparing the site, they discovered on the slope above Lake Vanare two pine trees with the trunks fused together to form an “H.” They felt it was a very favorable omen.

Over the years, the administration, volunteers, counselors, medical support personnel and thousands of benefactors have built Double H into what it is today: a far cry from its first summer session in 1993 when it served just four campers. Through trust, imagination, and a lot of hard work, campers now enjoy year-round activities, free of charge and nestled in the beautiful Adirondack foothills. Guided by a diverse and dedicated board of directors, medical advisory board, and passionate CEO Max Yurenda, the mission of providing specialized programs for children dealing with life-threatening illnesses and their families is unquestionably being fulfilled.

Courtesy of Double H Ranch



Two pine trees fused together to form an “H” was believed to be a favorable omen in the beginnings of Double H Ranch.



Children experience myriad activities during each of the seven summer sessions, and form friendships that last a lifetime.

During each of the seven summer sessions, as many as 126 children (aged 6 through 16) enjoy archery, an elaborate ropes course complete with zip line, horseback riding, arts and crafts, fishing and much more while forming friendships and creating life-changing experiences in a charmed setting. In autumn and spring, Double H hosts 15 family weekends centered on a variety of themes, including autism, diabetes, hematology, oncology and bereavement.

Adaptive winter sports are a focus in season. Volunteers, including the National Ski Patrol, ensure a 1:1 student/volunteer ratio. The bunny slope is ideal in length and contour for building self-confidence, while the parents savor another breakthrough with their amazing children. And if Mother Nature doesn’t cooperate, snow-making equipment guarantees Double H won’t miss a beat.

An extremely low camper-to-counselor ratio provides both safety and guidance throughout six busy days. With safety the paramount concern, Double H accepts only those children with illnesses it is qualified to handle; foremost among them: cancer, sickle-cell anemia, bleeding, immune and neuromuscular disorders, as

well as others listed on its comprehensive website, www.doublehranch.org.

Since 1994, Double H has partnered with Albany Medical Center to ensure the best medicine and best medical practices are made available. This solid medical expertise is one of the key reasons Double H has grown so dynamically as more parents became comfortable entrusting their children to Max and his accomplished team.

For those children unable to attend camp, Double H maintains its Hospital Outreach Program with 17 hospitals in New York, New Jersey and Pennsylvania.

Campers and their families aren’t the only ones whose lives are transformed at Double H. Volunteers and counselors return year after year for another dose of pure satisfaction from helping these children accomplish things no one thought possible.

I learned this firsthand during a recent visit to Double H in which Max Yurenda took me on a facility tour. I was told by several of the counselors I met that their work at the camp has inspired them to pursue music therapy and middle school teaching so they could continue to have a positive impact on young lives. I also

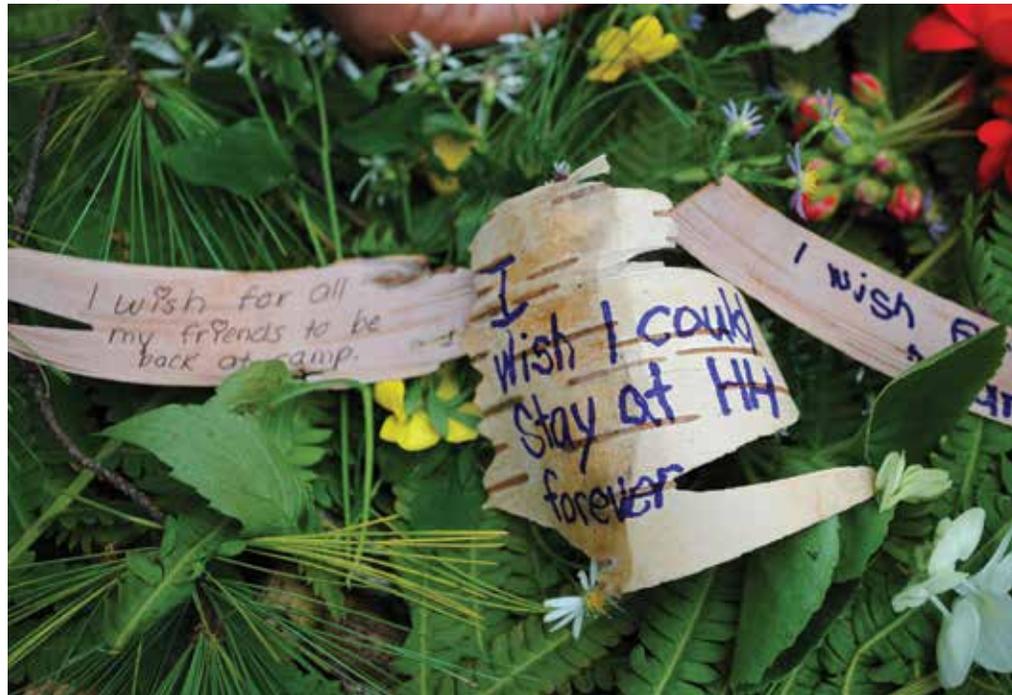
learned that many adult volunteers give up their vacation time to help realize the camp's mission, and still others create and conduct activities to help fund Double H's expenses, which run over \$3 million annually.

Of course, dedicated medical staff are key to the success of the camp. Max described how medical professionals are energized by helping kids enjoy camp and the outdoors far from an institutional setting. Many return to their regular jobs with renewed vigor and an appreciation for life which they gained through their work at Double H.

After Max gave me an overview of Double H, he walked me to the archery range where I met a couple of campers. One tall, thin, 14-year-old boy from the Bronx was in his second day at camp. I asked him what he thought about Double H. His immediate beaming smile was answer enough.

Following the talent show on the last evening of each summer session, children gather on the shore of Lake Vanare and launch birch-bark boats holding their wishes for the future. There is no doubt that hope for health and happiness drifts onto the lake at this emotional coda to camp.

Courtesy of Double H Ranch



On their last night of camp, children launch birch-bark boats holding their wishes for the future.

Everywhere I went, I saw smiling faces, on both kids and adults. Passing several plaques with images of Charley and Paul, I couldn't help but think how these two remarkable men have left a lasting legacy, nurtured by those with a passion to see that the magic of Double H Ranch continues forever.

And if the smiles I saw are any indication, it will do just that.



Avid nature lover, angler and hunter **Richard W. Crannell Jr.** works in business development for IBM and lives with his family in Somers, NY.

Courtesy of Double H Ranch



More Great Programs

To learn more about Double H Ranch and similar programs, visit the following websites:

Double H Ranch:
www.doublehbranch.org

Pediatric Oncology Resource Center:
www.ped-onc.org/cfissues/camps.html

NeedyMeds (Camps & Retreats):
www.needymeds.org/camps.taf?_function=cas_camps

New York Easter Seals, Camp Colonie:
<http://ny.easterseals.com>