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(PHOTOS AVAILABLE)

RAMAH OUTDOOR ADVENTURE BLASTS INTO SUMMER WITH INAUGURAL SEASON OF JEWISH CAMP

First-Ever Kosher, Shomer Shabbat Outdoor Adventure and Environmental Camp Attracts 121 Young Participants in Opening Season

New York – July 6, 2010 – Young Jewish campers – 121 of them from 17 states and all regions of the country - are in the Colorado Rockies launching the opening season of Ramah Outdoor Adventure, the first-ever overnight, Kosher, shomer Shabbat camp incorporating an intense wilderness experience.

The newest branch of the Ramah network of Jewish summer camps is unique in mission and scope, combining frameworks of wilderness adventure, environmentalism and Jewish learning to build youth leadership, strengthen Jewish identity and connect young Jews to each other and the earth.

“In the universe of Jewish camps, most are generalist in approach,” said Rabbi Eliav Bock, Director of Ramah Outdoor Adventure. “Here, we are returning to basics, being more primitive and living across the cycles of the day and the week. We are putting camp back into Jewish camping.”

Ramah Outdoor Adventure is located at Ramah in the Rockies, a 360-acre ranch in the Pike and San Isabel National Forests, 90 minutes from Denver.

“Our location provokes awe,” said Tammy Dollin, Project Director for Ramah in the Rockies. “The grandeur reminds us that life is not all about us, and so we use our surroundings to teach and learn and challenge. In Genesis we learn about working and guarding the land, and not using it for our own personal benefit. So there is a great deal to be derived from where we are, which could not be anywhere else.”

The entering sixth- through tenth graders attending Ramah Outdoor Adventure this summer are given full advantage of its unique location in multiple ways.

Activities at base camp include horseback riding, mountain biking, wilderness survival, orienteering, wilderness arts and crafts, bouldering and alpine field sports. And regular, extended excursions into the surrounding wilderness areas give campers an even greater perspective and experiences beyond the camp property.

“Each day our campers face challenges,” Rabbi Bock said. “The challenge might be how to wake up when it is still cold outside, or how to climb to the top of a cliff attached to a rope and harness or how to stay on a horse as it cantors up a mountain.

“At Ramah Outdoors, we see these challenges as a metaphor for life in general. If you can push yourself to go just a little beyond when you are riding a horse, climbing a cliff, or getting out of your tent in the morning, you can go above and beyond when you go back to school and back to your family and friends.”

At its core, Ramah Outdoor Adventure enriches the lives of Jewish youth by introducing Jewish learning and values in every aspect of campers’ daily lives.

Every Shabbat is spent at base camp as campers reflect on challenges and accomplishments of the week, pray together as a community, and relax and prepare for what comes next. And Jewish values such as *tikkun olam* and *bal tashhit* are reflected and taught through environmental lessons and text study drawn from the surroundings and from community service projects that benefit the land.

During the first week of camp, participants planted more than 500 trees on land decimated by the 2002 Hayman Fire that burned through 138,000 acres, most of it in the Pike National Forest and adjoining lands. Eighty acres of the affected land is on what is now camp property.

“Campers have told me of experiencing God for the first time during the quiet and peacefulness of davening alone in the woods during Shabbat,” Rabbi Bock said. “The spiritual nourishment and renewed commitment to Judaism are key ingredients that go into molding passionate and sensitive young Jewish adults.”

Ramah Outdoor Adventure is run under the auspices of the National Ramah Commission and is funded by the Jim Joseph Foundation, in partnership with the Foundation for Jewish Camp.

It is the eighth overnight camp within the Ramah network, which also includes three day camps. Ramah is the camping arm of the Conservative Movement, operating under the educational and religious guidance of the Jewish Theological Seminary (JTS).

“I am so happy that above all else, we now have more Ramah,” said Rabbi Mitch Cohen, Director of the National Ramah Commission. “As our eighth overnight camp, Ramah Outdoor Adventure is already meeting our lofty expectations for a Ramah experience, and more families and future leaders will benefit for years to come.”

JTS Chancellor Arnold Eisen agreed, and described the establishment and opening of the new camp as reflective of the dynamism within the Conservative Movement, American Jewry and Jewish camping.

“I’m a historian of Judaism and especially American Judaism,” Eisen says, “so I try to see these things in perspective. For me, this is not just building another camp somewhere, this is a sign of where this community of American Jews is going and where the Conservative movement is going.”