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CAMP ARANZAZU, ROCKPORT, BRINGS JOY TO CHRONICALLY ILL AND SPECIAL NEEDS CHILDREN AND ADULTS

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<http://www.camparanzazu.org/about>

 Love abounds at Camp Aranzazu, a year-round camp for chronically ill and special needs children and adults in Rockport, Texas. And when love abounds, campers learn, laugh, communicate, are helpful, joyful, and burst with happiness. That is one reason more than 20,000 campers and their support staff from more than 50 Texas counties – historically, 65 percent from the Coastal Bend area; 18 percent from the Houston area; 17 percent from San Antonio – have enjoyed Camp Aranzazu since 2006.

 Houston and Rockport residents Holly and Tom Forney founded the non-profit, 501(c)(3) organization in 2002 on an 86-acre site. Another 18 acres were recently added. The site was originally an Episcopal Church retreat on Copano Bay, near Rockport, Texas. The first campers arrived in June 2006.

 Experience has proven that campers leave changed for the better, motivated, and inspired.

 Major features are: Twenty-seven acres of waterfront and wetlands; 135 beds; Nine full-time staff, and one part-time; Provides room, board, and all activities, as well as supervision by three highly trained programming staff; Campers pay only one-third of the actual cost; Camp Aranzazu depends on support from the community to help underwrite the other two-thirds, which all total was approximately $1.2 million in 2017.

With the mission statement, “Camp Aranzazu is dedicated to enriching the lives of

children and adults with chronic illnesses and special needs by providing unique camping, environmental education, and retreat experiences,” nothing but good can happen.

According to Virginia Ballard, President of Camp Aranzazu, the word “Aranzazu” in Spanish could be termed “bosque,” which means “A spiritual place that requires a difficult path to reach.”
 Campers come with different challenges – cancer, muscular dystrophy; epilepsy, asthma, Down Syndrome, autism, spina bifida, cerebral palsy, juvenile diabetes, kidney disease, head and spinal cord injuries, neurological differences, hearing and sight impairments, to name a few. “They make friends and share simple challenges when they spend time at camp – benefits that last long after camp has ended,” Ballard relates.

 Those with special needs typically only have the opportunity to interact safely in a program and facility uniquely designed for them. Through behavioral, mental, and emotional growth opportunities, Camp Aranzazu gives young people a different involvement that they don’t get in school in the medically underserved Rockport and surrounding regions area.

 “’Intentional Camping’ is our unique program philosophy at Camp Aranzazu,” says Ballard. “Activities that we provide are too vast to list, but we define ‘Intentional Camping’ as a purposeful design of a camping experience to nurture the physical, social, emotional, mental, and spiritual development of each child.”

 Special needs children face many daily medical challenges, but oftentimes the hardest struggles are not experienced in the hospital, but by peers who see them as “different.” Sometimes, inadvertently, adults protect them from beneficial and natural childhood challenges. Thus, they learn to limit themselves to expectations placed on them by others. “Every activity during camp, large or small, is purposefully designed to accomplish something specific,” Ballard explains.

 Camp Aranzazu does not enroll individual campers, but Houston camping partners are: Aspire Academy and Social Motion Skills Program; The Briarwood School; Cornerstone Family Ministries; Memorial Hermann Hospital; The Parish School; Texas Children’s Hospital, and West Houston Young Life.

Staff is well trained and thoroughly screened. Partner groups bring their own staff, including medical staff.

Hurricane Harvey did immeasurable damage, preventing the hosting of the biggest fund-raiser of the year – ZaZu Fiesta, Fishing, and Fun. Support is needed more than ever, so the public is being asked to go to [www.camparanzazu.org](http://www.camparanzazu.org) and give as much as possible.

Summer camp begins June 3, and about 750 children are expected to attend, with 20 non-profit partner groups.

 Ballard offers good fundraising knowledge, as she has almost 30 years’ experience in fund raising and community development. She explained that when the Camp Aranzazu Board was recruiting a new president, because the camp is so reliant on philanthropy, they decided to hire her because she has a good background in the field.

 “I have been with the camp three years and chose them because their mission is not only compelling, but the Board is passionate, enthusiastic, and committed to serving this unique population,” she said. “In order to help more kids, it’s going to take more support from the community and fund raising end. I’m happy to serve in that way.”