A defining element of the Camp experience is campers learning that they are capable of more than they ever imagined. In a space where they can safely take on challenges and push the boundaries of possibility, they discover that their illness does not define them and that they are surrounded by a community of support who will help them reach new heights. And for nearly 20 years, the tower climb has been the culminating symbol of this.

“The tower experience is really a metaphor about life for our campers,” said Executive Camp Director Hilary Axtmayer. “If they are able to get through this challenge, what else can they do? They feel empowered to get through treatments, make friends or take on greater responsibility for themselves.”

But this summer, thanks to a generous gift from Mike and Eileen Kolakowski, a new challenge awaited our campers – Henry’s High Hopes Course and Audrey’s Air Lines. Built in partnership with Project Adventure, the new course has tripled the number of campers who can now participate in the tower program – allowing the oldest three units in each session to have a high ropes experience. It is more accessible as well, broadening the scope of who can participate and multiplying the activities available.

At Rare Disease Family Camp, the very first camper got to experience the new course. Paralyzed from the neck down, she was lifted to the top utilizing a pulley system and easily transferred to the zip lines where she experienced the freedom of zooming through the air. At the end, she was lowered to the ground with a simple push of a button, thanks to a hydraulic lift system.

“The new high ropes course is a multi-layered approach,” said Dennis Rinaldi, Camp’s program coordinator. “It’s no longer just about getting to the top. Campers are then challenged to work with their cabins on the new ropes elements. These dimensions have added new opportunities for both individual challenge and group dynamics.”

Henry’s High Hopes Course and Audrey’s Air Lines offer campers a cumulative experience where they build on skills each year. The middle and second oldest units of campers are able to climb their choice of two climbing walls, or be raised up to the platform by their cabinmates via the team lift, while the oldest campers can also choose to climb the new cargo net or vertical playpen to reach the top. Once there, Camp’s oldest campers are challenged by four different ropes elements while being cheered on by their friends. Using a static belay system, they are able to safely move themselves through the challenges, building their independence and confidence. And everyone has the opportunity to soar down the side-by-side zip lines with a friend, reveling in their accomplishment and experiencing the exhilaration of flying through the woods.

“I thought it would be pretty hard to climb up the net to get to the top of the tower,” a camper shared of her experience this summer. “But once I got going, it really wasn’t. I felt very accomplished and very proud of myself.”
What’s New at Camp

It’s been an exhilarating few months at Hole in the Wall, both on Camp and beyond. Over the last few months, we’ve piloted several new programs aimed at adolescents and young adults. In the spring, Hole in the Wall hosted its first ever Adolescent and Young Adult Conference. Fifteen participants from Connecticut and Massachusetts enjoyed a day that mixed Camp programming with educational sessions provided by Yale-New Haven Hospital. Looking ahead, the conference will be expanded to a fullWeekend Alumni Program that uses a similar format of combining Camp fun with informational programming.

In the summer, we offered Strides, a five-day program serving adolescents who are too medically complicated for a five-day program serving adolescents and Young Adult Conference. Fifteen participants from Connecticut and Massachusetts enjoyed a day that mixed Camp programming with educational sessions provided by Yale-New Haven Hospital. Looking ahead, the conference will be expanded to a fullWeekend Alumni Program that uses a similar format of combining Camp fun with informational programming.

The Hero’s Journey Canoe Program, also offered this summer, brought together eight past Hero’s Journey participants for a three-day reunion where they gained confidence and a sense of accomplishment by mastering a new skill. Each day of the program built on the previous day’s lessons and culminated in a three-hour canoe paddle on the Farmington River.

The summer brought other new, exciting experiences across the organization as well. Hole in the Wall was once again a primary charity beneficiary of the Travelers Championship. Camp was joined by celebrity friends Dane DeHaan and Tyler Hoechlin for the Celebrity Mini Golf Tournament, and Dane also participated in the Celebrity Pro-Am. Then, during Session 3, campers were treated to a special screening of Pixar’s Cars 3 which featured Camp Founder Paul Newman, utilizing historical content captured during the first Cars.

And in September, Sandra Boynton released her sixth CD and children’s songbook set – HOG WILD – and is donating all royalties to Hole in the Wall. Featuring toe-tapping tunes performed by celebrities including Kristin Bell, Patrick Wilson and Samuel L. Jackson, the book is available at https://www.workman.com/products/hog-wild.

From the CEO

As I look back on our 30th summer and the last three decades of Camp, I’m so proud of how Hole in the Wall has grown. We served just 288 campers our first summer in 1988. Today, we are providing “a different kind of healing” to more than 20,000 children and family members annually – many of them in multiple ways – through a variety of year-round programs. That’s awesome!

But, to be honest, I’m probably most proud of something about Camp that hasn’t changed.

Back in the late 1980s, the whole concept of a camp for children with cancer, AIDS and other grim diagnoses was a revolutionary proposition. But thanks to the boldness and benevolence of our Founder, these children and their families found a sanctuary at Camp – a place of fun, friendship and acceptance. Camp ended isolation and provided hope when it seemed most elusive. This is Hole in the Wall at its very best. It is our heritage. It is who we were born to be.

Today, our Founder’s example still resonates and inspires us to continue to reach out to other marginalized populations – such as those living with very rare illnesses who face a debilitating quality of life and uncertain medical future. Partnerships with the National Organization for Rare Disorders and other advocacy groups have allowed even more of these children and their families to experience our programs and find a “hole” new community of support.

It is because of these brave children and families that Camp does not have a comfort zone and never will. The Hole in the Wall board and staff are always thinking outside the box, pushing the boundaries of what is possible and finding new ways serve those who need Camp the most.

But none of this would be possible without you. Thank you so much for your continued faith in Camp’s mission.

Camp Holiday Tribute Cards Are Here!

Share some Camp spirit by recognizing clients, family and friends with Camp’s holiday tribute cards this holiday season. Featuring several choices of camper artwork, Camp’s holiday cards let you make a donation to Camp on behalf of others. Order today at www.holeinthewallgang.org/holiday or contact Maria Gomez at maria.gomez@holeinthewallgang.org or (203) 772-0522.
When a child is in the hospital, the patient’s entire family grapples with fear, uncertainty and stress as they cope with the medical challenges of a loved one. They, like their children, are in need of activities that help take their mind off the constant barrage of medical treatments and testing. Participating in one of a number of camps may be feeling isolated and alone. As one mom said, “This group is one of the few times my life feels a little normal. I’m having coffee and chatting with other parents.”

At three-months old, he became septic and it was unclear if he’d make it. I sat in a surgical waiting room staring down at a medical chart reading septic and it was unclear if he’d make it. I sat in a surgical waiting room staring down at a medical chart reading "intermediate at a week old, she was uncertain about his prognosis, telling us, "His condition is not necessarily incompatible with life.”

“The dream of Austin going to camp actually started 11 years ago. Despite a seemingly healthy pregnancy, Austin was born with a rare and complicated medical condition, and his prognosis was poor. After the surgeon resected 92% of Austin’s intestine at a week old, she was uncertain about his prognosis, telling us, “His condition is not necessarily incompatible with life.”

But most of all, I just want my child to feel a little normal. I’m having coffee and chatting with other parents.”

At three-months old, he became septic and it was unclear if he’d make it. I sat in a surgical waiting room staring down at a medical chart reading "intermediate at a week old, she was uncertain about his prognosis, telling us, “His condition is not necessarily incompatible with life.”

Although Austin has indeed lived and exceeded anyone’s expectations, his medical chart reads a bit like a logistical nightmare – almost six liters of IV fluid infusing 20 plus hours a day, central line, g-tube, ostomy, bleeding issues, plus mental health, behavioral and family issues. Our own hospital’s transplant camp, staffed by the nurses and doctors familiar with him, declined Austin’s application for their camp, stating his medical care was too demanding for them to manage. For three years, I searched for a camp that could take Austin, until we found Hole in the Wall.

“Parents walk away from the group feeling accomplished and amazed that they created something so beautiful,” said Heather Strauch, patient and family educator at Boston Children’s Hospital. “And the nurses find it beneficial to the caregivers they interact with as well. They say, ‘Mom was so relaxed when she came back, she was smiling, and I haven’t seen her smile for a while.’”

Camp for the Caregiver, which is offered across all HOP regions, launched at Boston Children’s Hospital to help fill a desire there to better support parents and caregivers. Groups take place on a monthly or weekly basis, depending on the hospital, and often coincide with programming aimed at children, so parents and caregivers can attend knowing their child will be occupied by another activity.

If you’d like to learn more about this program, or about Camp’s Hospital Outreach program, contact Chris Pontbriant, interim director, Hospital Outreach program, at chris.pontbriant@holeinthewallgang.org.

Camp may have seemed out of reach for Austin when he was born, but he had an amazing Camp experience at Hole in the Wall.

“For those of us with children with complex medical conditions, we fight hard for those normal experiences that are often out of reach for our kids. Not only did you fulfill Austin’s dream of going to camp, but you also fulfilled some of the seemingly impossible and grand dreams I had for Austin 11 years ago.”
Every summer, Hole in the Wall provides “a different kind of healing” to more than 1,100 seriously ill children through onsite programs. But the magic doesn’t stop at Camp’s gates. Thousands more children find joy, laughter and acceptance through Hospital Outreach and Family Outreach programs like CampWeek @ CHOP and CampOut regional events.
Sheriff’s Spotlight
A Shout-Out to our dedicated corporate partners.

For more than a decade, Travelers’ unwavering friendship has been instrumental in the continued growth of Camp. Through financial support, employee engagement and the Travelers Championship, Travelers’ impact has been far reaching and long lasting.

This past summer, like so many before, Hole in the Wall was honored to be a primary charity beneficiary of the Travelers Championship. Being affiliated with a world-class sporting event like the championship not only brings Camp much needed financial support but also helps to raise the organization’s profile in Connecticut and beyond.

“The Travelers Championship has provided Camp with a wonderful platform to share our mission, both at the event and through the media,” said Jimmy Canton, CEO of The Hole in the Wall Gang Camp. “Whether at our tent in the fan zone, in the celebrity mini golf tournament or during an interview, we are grateful to have the opportunity to be able to introduce new audiences to Camp as part of such an outstanding event.”

The support of Travelers’ employees has been nothing short of amazing as well. More than 196 employees have helped prepare Camp’s grounds for the celebrity Pro-Am at one of nine upcoming programs at one of nine events.

Additionally, the leadership team members have been steady guests at our events – a welcome show of support and active engagement.

“I always say that we at Travelers should be the ones thanking The Hole in the Wall Gang Camp, and not the other way around,” said Travelers Chairman and CEO Alan Schnitzer. “When you see a child play without a care or worry, or meet parents bearing the burden of a child’s disease who finally have a chance to take a breath, you realize how much better it is to give than to receive. We’re proud of our partnership with The Hole in the Wall Gang Camp and look forward to continuing it in the years ahead.”

The organization has been a staunch supporter of Camp’s benefit events as well, serving as lead sponsors for both the "Fore A Very Good Cause" Golf Tournament and the Fandango Benefit Gala. In addition, Travelers has provided significant financial support for Camp’s Hospital Outreach and Family Outreach programs.

The Travelers’ red umbrella has truly kept Hole in the Wall safely covered over the years,” Jimmy said. “And for that, we couldn’t be more grateful.”

For more information about Hole in the Wall’s Corporate Partners Program, please visit www.holeinthewallgang.org/get-involved or contact Ken Alberti, Camp’s chief development officer, at ken.alberti@holeinthewallgang.org or (203) 772-0522.

Our Events
Highlights of our latest benefit events and those to come…

A cool breeze, blue skies and amazing people. September 9th was a perfect day for more than 350 guests, who gathered at The Hole in the Wall Gang Camp in Ashford, Conn., for the 27th Fandango Benefit Gala, which raised more than $1.25 million for Camp.

The day kicked off with full bellies and a festive celebration thanks to a variety of tasty treats, lots of fun activities and great music by Boston-based band Business Time. Guests mingled throughout downtown Camp enjoying lobster rolls, tacos, pizza and more while crafting wooden nametags, creating photo magnets and bidding in the silent auction.

The afternoon continued with the live auction and short program where camper mom, Hillary, shared her experiences at Rare Disease Family Camp and the powerful impact Hole in the Wall has on children and families coping with extremely rare medical issues. Actress and auction emcee Whoopi Goldberg got the crowd excited, and a lively competition broke out among guests, which was spurred on by professional auctioneer duo Erin Ward and Bobby D. Standout items included a set visit to the set of This Is Us with a meet and greet with star Milo Ventimiglia, a signed portrait of Paul Newman, tickets to a Saturday Night Live dress rehearsal and more. Then Whoopi and Board member Terry Coughlin jumped in with their own impromptu offerings - a dinner with Whoopi and a bottle of 1965 Barolo autographed by Tony Award®-winner Kathleen Marshall.

It was then time for the main attraction – the Fandango performance starring several board members including Bridget Moynahan, Lissy Newman and James Naughton; as well as actresses Teri Hatcher; actress Melissa Joan Hart; Broadway stars including Justin Guarini; and 10 incredibly talented campers – Abigail, Connor, Elsa, Evan, Genevieve, Jeremy, Jocelyn, Jose, Lily and Nicole. Our campers were transformed into superheroes for the poignant show, which was written by Broadway fixtures Dick Scanlan and Michael Goldfried and directed by Tony Award®-winner Kathleen Marshall. During the show, a long-time Camp supporter, Travelers, was recognized with the Most Wanted Award for their unwavering friendship to Hole in the Wall.

Following the show, guests enjoyed a dinner buffet, delicious deserts, and danced the night away under the twinkling lights.

For more information on upcoming events, visit www.holeinthewallgang.org/campevents or contact Jennifer Weeks, director of special events at jennifer.weeks@holeinthewallgang.org or at (203) 772-0522.
Each year, hundreds of Camp supporters gather together for two exhilarating days of running and camaraderie. They relay across nearly 200 miles in beautiful Cape Cod, sharing laughter, fun and memories that will last a lifetime, all while raising money for Hole in the Wall. This year, the runners included a team of 12 dads who are committed to making a difference for children in need.

The Angry Dads began their charity running journey in 2012, running Ragnar Reach the Beach in New Jersey to support a classmate of their kids who was diagnosed with Adrenoleukodystrophy, a rare genetic disease. Over the years, they have run in a variety of athletic fundraisers, including some they created themselves, and in 2017, they joined our FUNraiser team by participating in Ragnar Relay Cape Cod.

“We ran a trail Ragnar last October to raise money for a local school charity,” said team captain Gareth Chilcoat. “With that little taste and remembering how much fun we had on the road relay, we signed up for the Ragnar Cape Cod lottery and then found Hole in the Wall. Our teammate Marc’s company was working with Camp on its high ropes course and had very good things to say about Hole in the Wall. So the choice to run for Camp was easy.”

The Angry Dads put their fundraising focus on their home state – New Jersey – leveraging Hole in the Wall’s Hospital Outreach program, which is in nine locations across the state. And they took their fundraising to the next level, raising more than $14,000 for Camp!

“It’s fun running Ragnar, spending time in the van poking fun at each other, laughing, meeting lots of others, looking at a map and seeing what we accomplished, and knowing what we did it for,” said Gareth. “I’d love to run for Camp again.”

To learn more about becoming a FUNraiser athlete, visit www.holeinthewallgang.org/ FU Nraiser and contact Andrea Keefe, manager peer-to-peer programs at andrea.keefe@holeinthewallgang.org or (203) 772-0522.

Finding your life’s calling can be challenging for most, but not for Casey Roche. She not only found a place of healing at Camp along with skills that would last her a lifetime – but also she discovered her greatest inspiration.

Casey was referred to Camp by a friend shortly after finishing treatment for acute lymphoblastic leukemia at Monmouth Medical Center. She was nine years old. From that summer on, she has been an integral part of each summer at Camp.

“I saw my counselors as role models in so many ways. I looked up to them and trusted them,” she said. “The idea of doing that for other kids was all I ever wanted to do.”

And she did. She attended Camp’s Leader in Training (LIT) program with the intention of becoming a counselor, a goal that she made reality in the subsequent years. “Working at Camp is by far the greatest privilege I have ever had in my life.”

She spent each summer from then on helping Camp out in a different way. Most recently, Casey was a counselor for the Hero’s Journey program. She helped kids who have aged out of the summer program feel the same sense of safety, respect and love that she experienced during her time as a camper. She feels that her experience attending Camp’s programs as a child allowed her to understand on a deeper level what campers need and how she can provide it to them. “So many kids reminded me of me. I go out of my way to tell them they are loved and to encourage them,” she said. “I want to challenge them to participate in Hero’s Journey just like I was challenged to participate.”

But her tireless kindness and passion for helping kids does not stop at the gates of Camp. Casey graduated with a degree in special education in hopes of bringing that Camp magic into classrooms for students who face a different set of challenges.

“I see Camp in everything I do,” she said. “Just like at Camp, we think we are filling the kids up, but they are filling us up even more.”

As a former camper, Casey was able to build on her experiences to provide an incredible experience for this summer’s Hero’s Journey participants.

The Angry Dads triumphantly cross the finish line of the 2017 Ragnar Relay Cape Cod.
Actress Teri Hatcher of Desperate Housewives and Supergirl and camper Genevieve share a smile at our superhero themed 27th Fandango Benefit Gala in September.

Look inside to see our campers climbing to new heights.