



### A lot more than just

# fun in the sun

Profiles of three Cape Cod summer camps with inspiring missions

By Wes Chaput



Cape Cod is a place of beauty and of beaches, of restaurants and riches, of artistry and affluence. It is also a place of great passion, emotion, dreams, and compassion for one's fellow man. In this article, we look at three summer camps on the Cape whose very function is to help, support, mentor, and inspire others.

**Camp Mitton**, located in the Lower Cape community of Brewster, is part of a South Shore-based organization called Crossroads that follows a simple mission: helping kids. Through various methods including building supportive mentoring relationships between campers and counselors, Camp Mitton's staff aims to inspire and support young people who have gone through trauma or crisis.

A few towns to the west in Marstons Mills, campers—including children and adults with developmental disabilities—at

**Cranberry Sunset Farm** have the chance to get a taste of what life is like on a farm by working with animals, riding horses, and tackling various chores. They also learn about gardening and nutrition, and gain a subtler education in concepts of teamwork and self-sufficiency. Ideally, when the cowbell rings for lunch—the Farm Life Program runs mornings until noon—the junior farmers will depart brimming with self-confidence, and a little green thumb knowhow.

Returning to Brewster, we find **Dream Day on Cape Cod**. This organization provides local families that have a child who is suffering with a chronic or life-threatening illness with a week's respite at this Cape Cod campground. Activities such as boating, fishing, and hiking abound, and the goal is simply to allow these families the chance to spend some quality time together in a beautiful location, in the fresh air, and far from any hospital visits and treatments.

Learn more about these three unique camps in the following pages.

## HARD WORK, healthy food

Cranberry Sunset Farm of Marstons Mills gives young people a taste of farm life



A sign posted on a fence at Cranberry Sunset Farm may provide insight into the mission of those who work there. "There is something about the outside of a horse," the sign states, "that is good for the inside of a man."

Staff at the Marstons Mills farm strive to help children, including some with developmental disabilities, learn life skills by working with and riding horses. Since 2006, an integral part of the farm's mission has been its Farm Life Program, the goal for which is to help youngsters build their self-confidence and self-sufficiency, and learn some tips on nutrition.

"Our goal is to try to maximize a child's future," says Leslie Ballotti, the owner and manager of the camp, who doubles as a pediatric nurse. "We set goals for each child," Ballotti says, adding that staff members are in close communication with the campers' parents during their stay to ensure the



youngsters' needs are best. If a child is prone to roaming, for example, he or she will be matched, one on one, with a staffer who will stay with them.

The Farm Life Program is held on weekday mornings for eight weeks throughout the summer. The campers arrive by 9 a.m. and their day begins with a quick game or nature walk. Then they get right to work on a variety of morning chores, including working in the farm's organic vegetable garden and cranberry bog and tending to the animals.

The farm acquired the bog recently, Ballotti says, and it has provided many opportunities to help teach the campers about hard work and healthy eating.

Ballotti says the vegetable garden is also used as a way to talk with the campers about healthy eating and lifestyles. Campers pick herbs, which will be used to make sun brewed



tea; they also harvest mint and lavender which can be used in the farm's homemade ice cream. In camp, Ballotti says meals and snacks feature nutritious foods, and candies and sweets are off limits.

During the week's many activities, an emphasis is also placed on teamwork and the campers' social development. "We do a lot of cooperative play," Ballotti says, referencing team scavenger hunts and carriage rides led by the farm's miniature horses. "If they win," she adds, "they win as a team."

The camp session ends each day at noon, at which point the farm commences its afternoon riding program. Though separate from the Farm Life Program, providing horseback-riding opportunities is another big part of Cranberry Sunset Farm's mission, and lessons can be taken throughout the year.

Cranberry Sunset Farm is located at 1964 Main Street in Marstons Mills. For more information, visit [cranberrysunsetfarm.com](http://cranberrysunsetfarm.com).