Fenn Putman

Today we induct Fenn Putman into our Hall of Fame - the longest serving member of the Board of Trustees in the history of Frost Valley YMCA; in 2012 he marks his fortieth year as a member. This summer we also honor his service as Trustee, President of the Board of Trustees, and Chairman of the Board, as he steps back, but only slightly, from the leadership positions he has held for twelve eventful years. Few in the long history of the camp have set a more consistent tone of caring and compassion and clear values-based intention, providing a model of focus and purpose that has permeated the culture of the organization from the Board member to the novice front-line staff.

Fenn was brought onto the Board in 1972 by Jim Kellogg, who recruited him for his business acumen and because he offered representation from Morris County, NJ., a key region for our campers and families, but underrepresented among the trustees. By his account – although no one else's – he languished on various committees and felt his participation to be "less than stellar." But there is no dispute about what happened next. After recruiting Fenn to the position of Treasurer in the early 1990's, Jim Kellogg planned to step down as Chairman in 1999 and persuaded Fenn to become President as Paul Guenther became succeeding Chair, with Jim continuing as Vice President for a few more years. Fenn's ascendancy to the leadership position crucially coincided with the announced impending retirement of long-serving Executive Director D. Halbe Brown after 35 years of visionary program expansion and land acquisition. Fenn chaired two search committees over the next few years. In the 10-month interim between these hiring efforts, he led a trustee-staff oversight committee, visited the camp every week, and essentially served as interim director of Frost Valley. The second search produced a result – the hiring of Jerry Huncosky as CEO – that Fenn counts as his most significant achievement as President. The Putman/Huncosky team led Frost Valley from operating deficit to surplus, improved staff housing, commenced the rationalization of Frost Valley's extensive land ownership, converted underutilized programs into thriving new centers, introduced rigorous assessments, and significantly refined the mission. If finding, hiring and retaining such an effective CEO is the achievement he ranks first, second is his co-chairmanship, with Hunter Corbin, of the capital campaign that produced funds to build Geyer Hall, Lakeview Lodge and the Guenther Family Wellness Center.

Nothing is more inspiring for Fenn Putman than being on hand for summer camp check-in days, where he watches, emotions welling in him, as a returning MAC camper jumps into the arms of his counselor from the summer before, while the child's parents stand by in utter tearful joy at their child's happiness. He attends every annual staff awards dinner and has found it "one of the most moving experiences of my life" – as truly great people are recognized for their selfless hard work while everyone else, far from feeling envious, is ecstatically supportive. When asked for a statement to sum up his feelings about Frost Valley, he characteristically again points to the staff. "What's impressed me," he says, "is how a dedicated staff, living in modest housing, earning modest income, does so much good for so many people and has changed so many lives." He adds that one need only contrast that with the conventional work experience – where someone "has a desk and a phone and wants a zillion dollars" – and one could only vastly prefer Frost Valley people. His constant support of the staff over forty years in time, talent and treasure is unmatched by anyone who has been a member of this Board. For his capacity to be inspired, and to inspire, and for his zeal about truly good work, we induct Fenn Putman into the Frost Valley Hall of Fame.