Charles and Marie Kremer

HALL OF FAME INDUCTEES

As we posthumously induct Charles and Marie Kremer into the Frost Valley Hall of Fame, we are lovingly surrounded by the Kremer family. This family—this legacy-minded community of generous, hard-working people—learned such qualities from a realistic, self-starting, tough, and independent couple. Their seven children had essentially no choice but to grow up at Frost Valley's camp, yet, predictably, in each case, Frost Valley soon became their own. There are as many Kremer experiences of adventure, challenge, and service to others at Frost Valley as there are Kremers. And it was always, all along, about family—a family that over the decades would create a vital, ongoing generational legacy, that would work with and help children at Frost Valley's camps, that would spend time when possible in their beloved Claryville, putting roots down here, befriending neighbors, responding to the community in good times and bad.

Charles and Marie themselves of course worked at Frost Valley, famously—Charles on the maintenance crew, Marie first as a chef in the dining hall (mostly in Girls' Camp) and then for many years as office manager—but it was never meant to stop there: each of their seven children also grew up at camp and worked at camp. Ray, starting in the early 1960s, was a Castle Boy, led Adventure Trips, was a counselor, worked non-summer weekends; Michael was a "bus boy" weekends and became a camp counselor; Margaret invented and led the Catskill Explorers for Girls and eventually became the Camp Director of Camp Hird; Anne was a babysitter for Halbe & Jane Brown's kids, was a CiT, JC, counselor, and (with Ray's wife Meg) led the first-ever Adventure Trip for girls; Charlie was a CiT, LiT, a Totem counselor, led trips, and became the Out-Trip Director; Andy went up through the villages as camper, became a counselor, led trips, worked weekends and on the maintenance crew; and, John, the youngest, joined the kitchen staff and also worked maintenance. As the Kremer children met loved ones and partners, these folks were drawn into the Frost Valley community too: Meg led trips; Joe was an Outpost VC; Will helped with the Tokyo Partnership camp; Karen worked at Arts & Crafts; and John met Jacqueline Dundorf, his future wife, at camp (she served as Sacky VC) during her six summers here. And then came the grandchildren: at last count five of Charles & Marie's grandkids have been on the staff, including, this very summer, Garrett (a Forest counselor) and Ben (Adventure Trip Leader). To explain the origin of his son Garrett's passion for being a counselor, Andy uses a classic Marie Kremer syllogism: "Garrett loved my mom. My mom loved camp. So he was going to love camp."

The Kremer family, including the patriarch and matriarch whom we honor today, have collectively committed 112 years of time, energy, skill, dedication, and most of all honest hard work to further Frost Valley's mission. Marie and Charles would not have had us honor them alone, for they brought a family to Claryville and they sent a family down the road to camp, and had they known of this induction would have insisted that they all be honored as one.

Marie's family found Red Hill in Denning as, in a sense, a refuge from a hectic and difficult immigrant life in New York City. There's a family rumor that her parents acquired fifty acres by trading for alcohol. Marie spent summers here, would make visits to the homes of country women, attended the one-room schoolhouse. She used to tell us that sometimes they resorted to saying prayers just to get the old car up Red Hill. Later she learned secretarial skills and then worked at Bendix Corporation, where, standing in the lunch line, she met a handsome, modest guy, Charles. Their courtship was happy and quick. The world war came. Charles had deferments but soon felt the need to serve. He fought in the 6th armored division, which landed in Normandy just after D-Day. With Patton's army, he fought in the horrific Battle of the Bulge, was in the first group to cross the Rhine, and saw the horrors of genocide at Buchenwald. Marie joined the service, too, stationed in California, flew in a bomber plane, rode a motorcycle, and rose to the rank of corporal in the Marine Corps (proudly outranking Charles).

Back in New Jersey, this "greatest generation" couple, not of course deeming themselves great, started a family with Ray's birth in 1946. Marie inherited the 50 acres in Denning. Charles fell in love with the spot. They rented a cabin from Harry Cole, and in 1954 they purchased 48 acres from Harry, right at the T where Frost Valley Road ends. Wawayanda moved to Frost Valley in 1958 and it was obvious to Marie and Charles what to do with all these kids during the summer. Anne recently summarized what her parents thinking must have been: "Frost Valley was there, down the road. You've got this big family, so what are you going to do. So they shipped us to camp and they came too. Only later did they realize how really significant it was that they and we all got to have this beautiful experience." Andy says: "It was a pragmatic solution that turned out to be a great idea." "Let's be honest," Andy adds, "I learned more at Frost Valley than I learned at business school. I learned how to balance personalities and understand people's motivations. And I learned about life. I learned what it's like to love the work you do."

Charles and Marie Kremer taught us all to love the work we do—not only their own children, children-in-law, and grandchildren, but all of those who worked with them. They lived through the worst of times in a crazy century and despite it all made a family and moved them to a spot in the world they considered paradise, which turned out to be seven miles from a valley where they could put their practicality and their generosity to work miraculously for the benefit of others. They always did good work in their time, and when we do the same good work today we honor them in exactly the way they would have wanted.