Dr. Jerome Wolff

In honoring Jerome “Jerry” Wolff, we recognize a YMCA leader who joined our camp’s Board of Trustees when that body was created for the first time in 1956. Jerry had been a member of the Plainfield Y Board while he was maintaining a medical practice as an eminent ophthalmologist there. Tapped to join the lay leadership of Camp Wawayanda in a time of organizational volatility and transition, he played a key role in the Board’s discovery of the Forstmann property in Branch, NY, in the late 1950s, and the camp’s momentous move there in 1958. He also helped the trustees and directors establish the new identity of Wawayanda, an already important summer camp, as an emerging major force in co-educational camping, environmental education, family conferencing, environmentalism, and health and fitness soon to be known as the Frost Valley YMCA. Jerry credited the Perth Amboy YMCA with his recovery from polio which he contracted as a youth growing up in Perth Amboy, New Jersey. Although the polio damage returned in Jerry’s later years, he always believed that swimming at the YMCA gave him a full and active life.

During his many summertime visits, Jerry was a regular visitor to – and impromptu white-glove inspector of – our Health Center, and for years the strongest and often lone voice advocating a new and improved health facility. He stood strongly behind the wellness “revolution” brought about by Halbe Brown and others in the late 1970s and early 1980s. He pushed for the building of a fitness trail around Lake Cole and elsewhere, and covered the costs of its construction with his own donations. In 1991, when the Frost Valley board sought a trustee who could act as planned gift legal advisor, he recruited Robert Haines, who currently serves, in his 22nd year of membership, as the Secretary and soon to be Vice Chairman of the Board – another key aspect of the Wolff legacy. After Jerry passed away in October 2003, we learned that, through a planned bequest, some 80% of his assets were to be given to Frost Valley; an endowment fund that will support us annually forever. In 2007, Neversink Lodge was renamed Wolff Lodge in his honor. In the summertime, children with special health requirements are housed there – a fitting tribute to a volunteer leader of Frost Valley who always felt that all children, regardless of health and ability, should have a chance to be at camp. Today we include in our Hall of Fame a generous person of persistent values and a practical sense of what was needed of him. As Bob Haines has simply put it, “Jerry Wolff put his money where his mouth was.”

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, N.J., 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 ascendency 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 program expansion and land acquisition. Fenn characteristically again points to the staff. “What’s impressed me,” he says, “is how a dedicated team, 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.