

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."

