

RA Camp means outdoor activities and the gospel

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LINDALE—The boys throw tomahawks, shoot rifles and practice archery skills. That's all part of Royal Ambassadors Camp, but it's more.



Royal Ambassador Camp “is a generational training facility for godly men,” said Ed Tunnell from First Baptist Church in Hawkins. (Texans on Mission Photo)

“This camp is a generational training facility for godly men,” said Ed Tunnell from First Baptist Church in Hawkins. Tunnell was among the adult leaders serving in early June for the RA Camp at Timberline Baptist Camp in East Texas.

“I brought my boys when they were this age (pre-teen) back in the '80s,

and I'm now bringing my grandson."

Then Tunnell pointed to a man nearby, adding, "And this young man right here, he was a friend of my sons, and he came with us (to camp in the '80s), and now he is bringing his sons."

RA chapters across Texas hold RA Camp each summer. Royal Ambassadors is a missions education program for boys supported by Texans on Mission. The Timberline camp near Lindale is one of this year's first.

Influenced by adult Christian leaders

Another dad at Timberline, Bryan Ransom of Southside Baptist Church in Tyler, has been bringing his five children to Timberline camps for about 10 years.

His younger son is now an RA, and his four older kids are volunteers at the RA Camp and the Girls in Action Camp, also at Timberline.

Coming to RA Camp is "a great opportunity not only for me to spend time with my own sons, but also to love others in Christ, hear the word of God, have some awesome camp food, and do all kinds of wonderful activities for a whole week," Ransom said.

Camp gives him time to be with his children and for them to be influenced by other adult Christian leaders.

"It gives dads and moms a way to spend even more time in the Lord with their children outside of the hustle and bustle of everyday life," Ransom said.

But the boys also hear other men sharing God's word and providing leadership. "I think it is paramount and extremely important" for the boys to hear from both their dad and other men, he added.

Southside Church brought seven boys to camp this year along with three older youth who once were RAs and now are volunteer leaders.



Joshua Meadows is an 18-year-old RA volunteer leader from Southern Oaks Baptist Church in Tyler who is heading to college in the fall.
(Texans on Mission Photo)

Joshua Meadows is an 18-year-old RA volunteer leader from Southern Oaks Baptist Church in Tyler who is heading to college in the fall. Six years ago, the church's RA boys started coming to the camp.

"My mom would come out here as the leader, and we'd stay with other great people," Meadows said. Everyone "made us all feel really welcome, ... and it was really fun and really enjoyable."

Southern Oaks has grown its RA program and brought about 20 boys to camp this year, "which is fantastic," Meadows said.

"It's just incredible to see how we've grown and ... to see God's work through everything," he said.

Kirk Acheson, camp director, said the goal is to lead the RA boys to being “on mission for God and to share the love of Christ with others.” Acheson, a member of Southside Baptist Church in Tyler, said the camp does this by emphasizing the Bible.

Share the gospel message

Shane Reynolds is the camp medic and a member of First Baptist Church in Alba. He came to faith in Christ as a boy attending camp at Timberline when he was 9 years old.



Shane Reynolds is the RA Camp medic and a member of First Baptist Church in Alba. He came to faith in Christ as a boy attending camp when he was 9 years old. (Texans on Mission Photo)

At camp, “you get to enjoy experiences that you might not otherwise experience at home, like firing rifles and archery and tomahawks. But the best thing is that they’re all exposed to the word of God,” he said.

Reynolds is now a paramedic with UT Health-East Texas, which provided emergency equipment for use during the week.

At camp, “I take care of these guys, make sure they stay hydrated, make sure they get their daily medicine, try to encourage them as best I can, [and] make sure they’re healthy.”

He also said he does “everything I can to make sure that we ultimately share the message of the gospel to these kids.”

But camp is not just good for the boys. Reynolds started volunteering three years ago while he recovered from an accident. Volunteering at RA Camp “helped me physically and really helped me spiritually, you know, to boost my Christian life and my walk with God.”

Kyle Acheson just graduated from high school and said he has been coming to RA Camp for about 14 years.

“I was a camper here for the longest time, and now I’ve been volunteering for a few years,” he said.

“I just love RA Camp, because I love seeing boys do the same stuff that I did as a kid and seeing them grow in the Lord.”

RA Camp gives the boys a “time of reflection and relaxation while also a time of discipline and teaching them about God and his ways,” he said.

“It’s just really a blessing being able to be out here and do manly things at this cool camp and just showing them what it means to be a man of God. ... I love it.”