

Rhonda Roberts: Getting away and finding God

July 18, 2018

Rhonda Roberts has served in camp ministry off and on since 1987. She has been with [Heart of Texas Baptist Camp and Conference Center](#) for a total of 24 years, 17 of those as executive director. From deep in the heart of one Texan, she shares her background and thoughts on camp ministry. To suggest a Baptist General Convention of Texas-affiliated leader to be featured in this column, or to apply to be featured yourself, [click here](#).

Background

Where else have you worked, and what were your positions?

- Glorieta Baptist Conference Center: summer staff (1987), summer staff leadership team (1988)
- Howard Payne University: admissions counselor (1991-1993)

Where did you grow up?

- Elementary school in Stanton, Texas
- High school in Fairfield, Texas

How did you come to faith in Christ?

I had a strong heritage of faith from my parents and grandparents.

My father, Frank O'Banion, was a career minister of music, education and administration in Texas Baptist churches.

My salvation experience was at a GA camp at Permian Basin Baptist Encampment (now known as Circle 6 Ranch).

I felt the call to full-time Christian service during a youth camp at Latham Springs Baptist Camp.

Where were you educated, and what degrees did you receive?

Howard Payne University: Bachelor of Business Administration (1991)

Ministry/Profession

Why do you feel called into camp ministry?

I feel Christian camping is a fit for me only God could have orchestrated.

Camp is a unique crossroads of guest service through hospitality and ministry. As primarily a rental facility, our staff may not be “on stage,” but we have so many opportunities to show the love of Jesus through our hospitality to our guests.

There are hundreds of lives changed each week in summer camps and throughout the year with retreats, and our staff has the opportunity to play a unique role in ministering to our guests.

Although I often feel humbled and unqualified for this ministry, God always equips me with the skills and wisdom needed for the task at hand.

I like the quote by Martin Luther: “The Christian Shoemaker does his duty not by putting little crosses on the shoes, but by making good shoes, because God is interested in good craftsmanship.”

I feel by serving God’s people with excellence in hospitality, we are ministering to others.

What is your favorite aspect of camp ministry? Why?

I love seeing our guests who come from populated areas and are in awe of nature. The trees, birds, stars and sunsets over Lake Brownwood all come alive when you are at camp.

There is a peace and a freedom about being near nature that draws people to their Creator. When people get away from their normal routine and busy lives, they find God and hear his voice.

What one aspect of camp ministry gives you the greatest joy?

It is a joy to see God provide for our ministry through people.

God provides financial support through some churches and individuals, and then sends others to volunteer and work along with us. I can look all over our campus and point out projects where God provided through people.

I have been privileged to work with some wonderful and talented people who have been a blessing to our camp. I have learned through the years that volunteers are not just people who have extra time and money; they may not have either, but they all have the heart of service!

Some of our staff and volunteers have had a life-changing experience at camp and want to give back with grateful hearts.

How has your ministry or your perspective on ministry changed?

The last several years have shifted to higher levels of regulations and security, which involves background checks and education for sponsors for the protection of our students. Most of the regulations are state mandated; however, they are great precautionary measures and have made our camps much safer.

When the regulations were first imposed, it was a hurdle to cross with our groups; however, I have come to a greater appreciation for this process and desire to do everything we can to make camp a safe and secure place for our guests.

Name the three most significant challenges and/or influences facing your ministry.

1. Funding for operations and improvements. When the camp was founded in 1946, it was owned and supported by the area churches and associations. We are blessed by many area churches who still support our camp in their budget; however, many churches have been faced with challenges of budget cuts, which in turn has affected camp ministry. Camps are now challenged to discover other sources of funding without losing the connection and tradition with our founding churches.
2. Serving a generation who is addicted to social media and technology and learning how to adapt camp ministry to appeal to this generation.
3. Promotion and marketing of traditional camp facilities today with many competing options.

What do you wish more people knew about camp ministry?

I wish all churches realized how significant a camp experience can be to children and youth. It is intentional targeted evangelism, so it can be a tremendous outreach tool for the students in a local community as well as unchurched families.

Some people (students or adults) will come to camp before they would ever go to a church. Throughout the years I have seen many lives changed through divine appointments at camp. Many of those experiences would not

have been possible without camp and the encouragement from a local church.

Traditional camp experiences provide the opportunity for students and adults to get away from the distractions of the world such as social media, TV, family problems or work stress. When distractions are removed, the stage is set for God to work in the hearts of campers.

If you do the math, figuring an average day at camp lasts 13 hours, four days equals a year of our Sunday morning meetings in terms of hours. In these 52+ hours, the students aren't being distracted by "the world." They are worshiping, getting teaching and having conversations about God; and they are in the middle of his amazing creation. There is no denying God uses the unique environment of camp to powerfully change lives.

About Rhonda

Who were/are your mentors, and how did/do they influence you?

I was grounded in the faith by my parents, who lived in service to churches where they were called. I was blessed to be raised in a home where I never doubted I was loved, accepted, safe and encouraged to excel. I was influenced by my parents with character, integrity and a strong work ethic.

I have been mentored in Christian camping by my predecessor at Heart of Texas, Marlin Felts. I worked for him for 12 years before he retired in 2000. He was gracious to give me opportunities of leadership, which provided valuable experience in later years.

I have also gained wisdom from directors of other camps, as well as some great board members and staff members here at Heart of Texas Camp.

What is the impact of camp ministry on your family?

Camp has impacted my family over multiple generations. My father grew up attending Alto Frio Camp, and it was there he surrendered to full-time ministry at the age of 12.

As a child, my mother and her family enjoyed camp at Leuders for many years.

I attended camp at Permian Basin Baptist Encampment as a child, and all of my siblings and I have attended Latham Springs. I can easily say most of my immediate family have made life life-changing decisions at camp.

I met my husband through his mother, who was on staff here at Heart of Texas Camp. We were married in our camp worship center in 2007.

Other than the Bible, name some of your favorite books or authors, and explain why.

My top three favorite authors are Andy Andrews, Mark Batterson and Bob Goff. I like reading their material because they challenge my thinking and perspective with very practical and profound ways to live and grow as a Christian.

What is your favorite Bible verse or passage? Why?

One of my favorite verses is our theme verse for the camp staff this summer: "Perhaps this is the moment for which you have been created" (Esther 4:14). This reminds me of the many provisions God has shown us through staff and volunteers.

For over 70 years, God has been blessing the ministry of Heart of Texas Camp by orchestrating skills with needs. He brings people to camp to serve or to be served at just the right time.

Name something about you that would surprise people who know you well.

God has given me a creative nature, which has inspired many places and objects around camp through my years of service. In 2016, I created a chainsaw carving in one of our dying camp trees. What was an old forgotten tree is now the image of a human hand pointing to God as "One Way" to salvation.



