

# Retreat Center



"Damaris was fantastic – Our group was so inspired by the messages she gave that we will be reading through the Bible in our Women's Ministry this year, and we are SO excited to grow in our walk with Christ!"

Women's Retreat participants



## God is growing His church

by Jonny Tice, Retreat Center Program Manager

"We **have been blessed** by a successful year of ministry! Our summer program staff were incredibly hard-working and flexible. Guests were able to build community through lots of fun activities and awesome teaching from our speakers and corporate times of worship. We thank God for the way He was able to use our ministry to **strengthen His church** in the midst of an incredibly challenging year."

- 982 lodged guests
- 752 campground guests Seasonals included
- 95 day guests

## 2022 registration's open!

Our theme: Abide in Me! John 15:4

### CrossGen Conference: JAN. 7-9

- Speaker **Hugh Halter**
- Finland Mennonite Church Worship Team

### Men's Retreat: JAN. 13-14

- Speaker **Erik Kratz**, former MLB player & mentor
- **Jamal Sarikoki**, worship + **Dr. Tony Beckett**, speaker

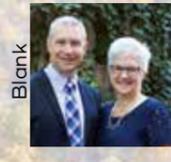
### Couples Retreat: FEB. 11-13

- Speakers **Keith & Brenda Blank**
- For **The Fatherless**, worship

### Engage Youth Leaders Conference: MAR. 28-30

- Speaker **Timothy Eldred**
- **Drew Wagner & Band**, worship

Engage



# Reflections

Fall & Winter 2021-22

## Our Testimony

We can't help but tell how God has shown up in the life of Pinebrook & Spruce Lake this past year, and to bring the Glory to Him!

*Spruce Lake opened its doors almost 60 years ago and is still Pointing People Toward Christ! Even throughout these difficult times, God has drawn people to Himself. He has provided for, sustained and encouraged us so that today, Spruce Lake & Pinebrook are stable and alive.*

### Last Year in Review

In March, 2020, I had highlighted this verse in the spring Reflections:

**Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.** Matthew 6:33

So, we set out to love and serve people in any way we could, and to display the Peace of Christ in this crisis. I must say, there were days when we wondered about it all!

**But the ministry stayed the course through prayer, the wisdom of many counselors, and with God's provision. These snapshots show how God has brought us from the darkness of 2020 to the stable place we're in today:**

- (1) We prayed daily** for much but especially for this – that God would protect these properties from Covid so we could keep serving everyone who came to us. Too bold? Crazy? *There was not one Covid case in any of our events during all of 2020.*
- (2) We stayed open** every opportunity we were able, whether online or in person.
- (3) We honed the art of "just waiting."** Three examples stand out:
  - Spruce Lake Day Camp opened – **JUST AS** the state allowed childcare to once again open legally. We could serve local families, whose children heard the gospel and sang songs about Christ. God enabled us to offer His peace.
  - Wilderness Camp opened in July – **JUST AS** the "Green Phase" allowed camps to reopen. We served 300 children in 2020; some of them heard of or accepted Christ for the first time. In fact, not only was there not one case of Covid, but it was *the healthiest summer ever* – not one stomach bug, flu or ambulance run.
  - August Family Week also took place – **JUST AS** the "Green Phase" opened things up. It felt so good once again to see people enjoying their experience here!
- (4) We cared for our staff.** Historically, nonprofits choose to be exempt from Unemployment Compensation to save the expense over the years, but Spruce Lake has never taken this option. So this was available **JUST AS** we had to lay off 90+ full and part-time staff in one day.
- (5) God used the federal government** to save thousands of Christian ministries, including us, from nose-diving into debt or shutting down. **JUST AS** we needed it, the regulations that usually prevent us from using government money were removed.

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pinebrook.org

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Spruce Mountain inspires many people on their spiritual journeys. **Abigail Crew & Ethan Garrett** were also inspired by the vision of a future together!

They got engaged on Spruce Mountain in the summer of 2020, and married November 28, 2020.

Their home is in Spring Hill, Tennessee.

*Congratulations!*



**(6) Incredible support from the Spruce Lake community saw us through.** There were cards and notes, phone calls and prayers. Donations poured in. In June, 2020, **JUST AS** I had not yet made a single call seeking support for operating expenses, checks began arriving! *All in our community gave over \$1,100,000 to sustain the ministry.*

**Before 2020, we would all tell of the blessings God had showered on Spruce Lake:**

- Building the new Spruce Lodge
- Buying and securing Spruce Mountain for the next generation
- Building the Mountain View gym at Wilderness Camp
- Watching hundreds of kids respond to Christ's call each year at Wilderness Camp Firesides

**Now we can tell of His wonders in the tough times as well.  
You can't help but see His hand guiding and protecting His ministry now...  
WOW!!!**

**At Pinebrook in 2021,** we opened our first summer of Day Camp and the guest groups have been returning all year. We've renovated 80% of the guest rooms and replaced all but a few roofs. The sewer plant is currently being renovated so it can function well for the next decade. We continue to believe God has great plans for this property.

**At Spruce Lake,** as we recovered from the downturn, over 15,000 guests returned in 2021. We're renovating, fixing and updating as much as we can afford. Last year, we had gone ahead (as funds were already committed) with the sewer plant improvements required for us to approach DEP, when it's time, for final approval on our cabin project.

**Regarding the youth campus cabin project** – yes, costs will be much higher now than two years ago! The board is currently reviewing the project, looking for God's timing. *There is much to review and many issues to resolve, so please keep this process in your prayers. Be assured that all the dollars already given toward the cabins have been held in reserve, and are available when it is time to move forward.*

Trust with us that the mission of Pinebrook & Spruce Lake will continue – with even greater vision and a deeper ability to love others. We will continue to seek God's kingdom first, and allow Him to do the rest!

May God strengthen YOUR faith in Him, as well as ours.  
To our God be the glory!

Mark Swartley  
Executive Director  
Spruce Lake & Pinebrook



**"The time and fun we had as a family and community is amazing! (We) had a blast!"**

Guests @ NEW Wilderness Family Camp

## Youth Ministry

**"We** loved the opportunity to extend our learning outdoors and connecting our students to God, their creator!" – NEW school, Outdoor Ed

**"We** were referred to **Day Camp** by a family friend – the kids loved the activities and the atmosphere. We will definitely be back!" – Camper Parent



### God provided help when needed

by Josh Reichart, Wilderness Camp Director

**"We far exceeded our expectations this summer!** We had expected to run camp at only 60% capacity, but we **served close to 80%** of our 2019 (pre-Covid) numbers! We were still hiring well into the summer to have enough staff for so many campers; we worked diligently to allow **all wait-listed campers** to attend. **The biggest thing** was God **providing people to help** when we needed it most!"

- **659 overnight campers** from 444 different families
- **36 campers (9 families)** in our first-ever Wilderness Family Camp

**200+ Wilderness Campers talked with counselors on Invitation Nights**

**Day Camp, biggest ever!**  
• 2 locations  
• 275 campers  
• 194 families

### We were blown away!

by Brian Espenshade, Day Camp Director

**"We did not know how many campers to expect for our first summer of Day Camp at PINEBROOK.** Praise God – we were blown away by the response!

- **68 families registered**
- **40-45 campers per day,** all we could handle with the number of staff we had. The community's response has been extremely positive, so we anticipate that many more campers will come in 2022.

• **10th summer of running Day Camp @ SPRUCE LAKE:**

We had a fantastic staff and a very solid summer. Campers learned memory verses every week, and counselors had a blast bringing Bible stories to life through skits."



### Schools pleased with program

by Connie Wismer, Outdoor Education Director

- **16 schools (562 people)** –not including final weeks at the end of November
- **2 new schools this fall**

Some teachers, new to our program, were impressed by the spiritual insights and the depth to which students were taken in their activities. The teachers want to use these same themes to **mentor their students throughout the year.** In their classes as well, students will relate back to their outdoor learning experiences in Ecology, Pond Study, and the Waterfall Hike.