

Mikell Camp and Conference Center, Report to Council 2020

Mikell Camp and Conference Center and Blue Ridge Outdoor Education Center are owned and operated by the Episcopal Diocese of Atlanta. We have had the pleasure to offer the ministry of hospitality to numerous public and private schools, church retreats of Episcopal and non-Episcopal denominations, business groups, youth groups, vestry retreats, folk art weekends, recovery group weekends, spirituality weekends, and of course our summer campers- pre-COVID!

The Blue Ridge Outdoor Education Center offers Georgia approved curriculum to public and private schools in Georgia and beyond. Under the leadership of director Blake Burks, the Blue Ridge program had a record year of students before COVID. Classes include forest ecology, wetlands ecology, predator/prey, owl prowls, stream ecology, and evening offerings of Cherokee and Appalachian culture. Much of Blue Ridge's business is repeat business, which reflects a high quality of programming.

Our summer camp program engages over 800 young people each summer from around the Diocese and beyond. Leadership is an integral part of our program, as older campers have the opportunity to become volunteer counselors and then paid summer staff members. A number of clergy, youth leaders and lay leaders in our Diocese trace their roots to Mikell formation. Our summer program gives children and youth an opportunity to live in Christian community and to learn more about God, develop their relationship with Jesus, learn to love their neighbor, and to learn to better love themselves.

Due to a generous grant from the Diocesan Foundation, we were able to renovate all the bathrooms in our dorms. The bathrooms were entirely gutted, including the concrete floors, plumbing and fixtures. The new bathrooms have floor to ceiling tile, commercial partitions for privacy, much more room in the showers and stalls, and allow us to meet Safeguarding God's Children and People privacy guidelines. Work is beginning to create a two-lane road into camp which will increase safety and offer a better first impression.

Since March and the onset of the pandemic, we had to let our seasonal and part-time staff go. The 6 permanent staff and I continue to keep Mikell operating, cutting grass and fallen trees, blowing leaves, addressing maintenance issues, cleaning, maintaining the pool, running the office, working on and completing the bathroom project in the dorms, and addressing other projects. The Capital Campaign continues to meet periodically. The Board has formed a dismantling racism committee to evaluate Mikell's policies and operations and to help us be more inclusive.

We are hosting families and individuals for retreats, and if you would like to get away for a week or weekend, please let us know.

Even though we understand and support being safe, we are all terribly missing our Blue Ridge school groups, summer campers, and many groups that join us regularly throughout the year, as we are committed to and enjoy our ministry of hospitality and serving the Diocese of Atlanta.

The Rev. Kenneth C. Struble
Executive Director
Mikell Camp and Conference Center