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## **Camp Rainbow lets kids forget about illness**

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*Staff*

Week of summer games turn sick kids into happy campers

Camp at Land Between the Lakes gives youngsters chance to be kids

"It's a camp for special-needs kids. We wrestle, we play football. We get to fish and all kinds of junk." -

A.J. Prescott

By MELISSA TYNDALL

The Leaf-Chronicle

BRANDON SPRINGS - A.J. Prescott likes the Lakers, playing "Halo 2" and hitting the basketball court, but he will also tell you that he is the cutest boy at Camp Rainbow.

"It's a camp for special-needs kids. We have a nurse, lunch, bedtime - we wrestle, we play football in the activity center. We get to fish and all kinds of junk," he said.

The 10 year-old, deemed "C-Money," is an exemplary camper. He is flamboyant, talkative, does handstands and play-fights with Carlos Farmer, a good friend he met at the camp four years ago.

"I got guns," he cried out, flexing his muscles while riding on his counselor's shoulders and headed for a dip in the pool.

Swimming, however, was only one of the many activities for kids like A.J. at camp Rainbow on Tuesday. The camp was launched by Mary Woodall and Diane Miner in 1983 - a spin-off of the Dream Factory - to give seriously ill children an opportunity to attend summer camp for one week at no cost to their parents.

While the health of the children is monitored by **Premier Medical Group** of Clarksville, the camp focuses on giving the children a week to have fun - one-on-one- with their counselors. At the Brandon Springs **Group** Campgrounds at Land Between the Lakes, children rode horses, swam in the pool, fished, went on boat rides and made dresses for Friday night's big bang - a Hollywood-like red carpet event.

Some of the female campers spent time Tuesday afternoon preparing to make themselves as glamorous as the rich and famous as they decorated dresses for the last night at camp.

Francesca Amicucci and her counselor, Amanda Swearingen, could not stop smiling as they glued silver stars on the straps of a satin, purple dress.

"I love it," Swearingen said of her first year as a counselor. "I never even got to go to camp as a child - it's fun."

Counselors volunteer their time to the week-long camp, and Bikers Who Care also devote a great deal of time and money to the camp. The organization this year donated \$50,000 to the camp.

"It's been really great for the bikers. People really respect the Bikers Who Care. It's a win-win situation," Miner said. "The bikers and counselors are a perfect example of God's love because people totally give of themselves to make sure these kids have a good time."

Betsy Branson, the arts and crafts leader this year, came to the camp thanks to a biker as well - her husband.

"I didn't think I could handle it -I didn't want to be a sobbing mess. Once you're here though, the pattern changes. These are kids, they want to have fun and forget about things. It's a life-changing experience, and I mean that from the bottom of my heart," she said. "You see how small our problems are. You see what they've been able to overcome, and there's nothing you can't do."

One child benefiting from Branson's activities was Catelyn Ellis, an 8-year-old who loves "Full House," the color purple and Hilary Duff.

"I like my friends and how they play with me - and fishing," she said, making arts and crafts with colored sand. "My friends here change every year, but I still like them."

Branson said working with the children at Camp Rainbow is a pleasure and a reward in itself.

"It's been a joy - it's fun and challenging to find things for the kids to do," Branson said. "It is indescribable - the rewards you gain from this. I get chill bumps thinking about it. The kids are great and I want every one to leave with a smile on their face."

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· Check out our gallery of photos from Camp Rainbow at [www.theleafchronicle.com](http://www.theleafchronicle.com). n Visit Camp Rainbow's Web site at [www.camprainbow.com](http://www.camprainbow.com)

Photo captions:

Amanda Swearingen, left, helps Francesca Amicucci, 10, glue stars on a dress the girl will wear to the formal on the last night of Camp Rainbow. Special-needs kids at Camp Rainbow in Brandon Springs are treated to an array of activities during the week they attend. Greg Williamson/The Leaf-Chronicle  
A.J. Prescott, 10, and his counselor, Andy Roads, took a break from the heat by jumping into the pool Tuesday at Camp Rainbow at Brandon Springs in Land Between the Lakes. Greg Williamson/The Leaf-Chronicle