

Glenwood School offers a year-round welcome for students

By Lynda J. Hemmerling, The Star

At all times, The Glenwood School for Boys and Girls has its arms outstretched to youngsters, providing them a home away from home.

This summer is no different. The beautifully forested campus and warm brick buildings are as inviting as ever.

The only distinctions for summer are the academic program, which downshifts slightly, and the new room being made for more girls.

A third girls cottage was slated to open June 15.

Maura FitzGerald-West, director of residential services, said Glenwood School is a great place to work and a great place for children to live, learn and grow.

"They really feel safe here," she said. "They feel comfortable here to learn, be themselves and grow. I think most of them really believe they wouldn't be as happy if they weren't here."

The cornerstone of Glenwood's work is its residential program. Students live in "cottages" with houseparents, many of whom have children of their own, and about 10 other Glenwood students.

Most students live on campus during the week and attend school, returning home on weekends. That formula is pretty much the same through the summer, although the amount of time invested in academics is less.

Older students can get summer jobs on campus, and there are extra offerings of fun mixed with learning.



Photos by Mary Compton/The Star

Volunteer Tony Perkins of Rogers and Hollands Jewelers helps with the walking ski race at the Glenwood School's Olympic day. Justin Cottrell, Bryce Hicks and Joshua Paris share a ski.

Under the direction of Jan Storms, director of resource and summer school program, the summer education program is in full swing.

Two four-week sessions of 20 youths in each session are scheduled. The youths participate in a variety of academic and skill enhancement programs.

The theme of this year's Gustafson Family Charitable Foundation's summer literacy program is "The more you read, the more you know."

About 60 percent of children who come to Glenwood have learning deficits. Those with the most potential and need are selected for the summer program.

Reading, phonics, math, and motor and listening skills top the educational list, but there is so much more, including guest speakers and field trips to bridge the gap between lessons and everyday life.

Other fun activities such as woodworking and crafts are part of the summer program. Students may also participate in the summer recreation program.

Many choose to attend a summer camp in northern Wisconsin where they swim, fish, sail, canoe and build lasting friendships.

Sergio Rodriguez, 17, has loved summer camp, but will not be attending this year because he will be working at Fresh Starts restaurant in

Flossmoor as an assistant chef — another thing that he truly loves.

Rodriguez said he would never have received the opportunity without the aid of Glenwood School.

"I love it here," said Rodriguez, who will be a junior in Bloom Township High School District 206 next year.

His next educational plan is to attend the Culinary Institute of Arts in New York and become a chef.

Rodriguez told his mom about four years ago that he wanted to attend Glenwood like his older brother and has never regretted the decision.

Rodriguez said he has great grades and "great friends." He is a member of Glenwood's military program and a naval ROTC at Bloom.

"If I wasn't here, I'd probably be looking for a job right now," he said. "School would be tough and I wouldn't be as happy."

Since 1887, Glenwood School has provided a safe place for children in grades two through eight to live, learn and grow.

It also helps high-school-age students who choose to stay for additional guidance and structure while attending a local high school.

John Irwin, president and CEO, said the school's mission is to help children reach their potential by providing a quality environment for lower-income and single-parent families who want positive alternatives to home and community situations.

Glenwood partners with parents — many of whom work

long hours to support their children — to serve families, he said.

"Our program is successful because we work with families we know we can help," Irwin said.

With that in mind, houseparents work extra hard to provide guidance, discipline and nurturing support that children need to grow into responsible adults.

That support has really helped Luis Barraza, who will turn 18 in August.

The youth, who graduated with honors from Marian Catholic High School, is going to study engineering at Purdue University. He received a large scholarship to attend.

With the help of Glenwood School, Barraza has grown from a struggling student to an honor roll student who has participated in football, weightlifting and the school's military program.

"I really do like it here," Barraza said. "I know my leadership skills have really improved a lot."

FitzGerald-West said there is nothing better than seeing the children realize their potential, set goals and begin excelling.

Girls were introduced to the school in 2001 through the day program, and just last year cottages were opened for them.

Richard Batterham, south campus vice president and CEO, said Glenwood's program is "really geared to what the kids need."

It's important to offer summer programs so that children can continue the learning process, he said.



Tony Wilson, a student at Glenwood School, takes part in a tire race.

In addition to the 117-year-old Glenwood campus at 18700 S. Halsted St., the 10-year-old Rathje Campus is located in northwest suburban St. Charles.

Each school has an accredited grade school. Together, they serve about 280 children annually.

Glenwood School is a not-for-profit organization supported entirely by contributions from community-minded individuals and organizations.

Because many families live at or below the poverty level, parents — typically single mothers — pay only what they can afford, usually just 2 percent to 6 percent of the total annual cost to send a child to Glenwood.

More information about the school is available by calling (708) 754-0175.