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# A Match Made For Camp

**YMCA CAMP OAKES OPENS ITS DOORS TO NURSING HOME PATIENTS DURING COVID-19**

By Christine Schaffran

For camp directors and owners whose innate nature is to serve others, there is little that will stand in the way of fulfilling that mission—even a global pandemic.



Such is the case for Matt Garcia, executive director of YMCA Camp Oakes in Big Bear City, Calif., who found a way to utilize his camp while it remains idle in the wake of orders to close down all non-essential businesses during the COVID-19 crisis. While the industry is holding its collective breath, wondering if there will be a summer camp season, Garcia partnered with a local hospital to house patients from a nursing home attached to Bear Valley Community Hospital.

“There was no magic in the beginning,” he says. “I just picked up the phone and called the hospital. I told them I have 256 beds and a kitchen, and they were here two hours later.”

Garcia explains that the hospital was already looking for a place to temporarily relocate its nursing home patients because it was bracing for an onslaught of sick community members.

After completely emptying the facility, a lodge that typically houses 52 beds for campers is now home to 15 nursing home patients.

“The only thing left in there was the art on the walls,” Garcia points out. “We turned the building over, and it’s a miniature hospital now.”

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“From hello to residents was nine days,” he adds, noting that such a partnership with a hospital would typically entail endless negotiations and an equally large legal document.



Garcia credits YMCA of Greater Long Beach, of which the camp is a part, as well as hospital staff members for reacting so quickly to make the deal happen.

“This is a group of really impressive people who jumped on the ball,” he notes.

The agreement comes with a list of precautions to ensure the safety of the patients as well as the camp staff. “No one goes near that building unless they need to,” he emphasizes.

Those on the “need-to” list are limited to food-service employees who deliver meals to patients. Even then, there is a list of requirements: face masks, health checks that include temperature checks, and other safeguards.

Garcia says watching the medical staff is truly a sight to hold.

“The medial workers are the best,” he says. “They are totally fearless in the face of what they know is coming.”

He notes that, if anyone is considering a similar venture, his advice is to simply pick up the phone and call the local hospital.

“You won’t know if you don’t ask,” he says. “The worst thing they can say is no.”

He adds there are no special ingredients to make the venture successful, unless you count on an executive director who couldn’t resist the temptation to help.

“We get involved, that’s what we do,” Garcia notes of the profession. “All it takes is a desire to help and a little proactivity.”

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