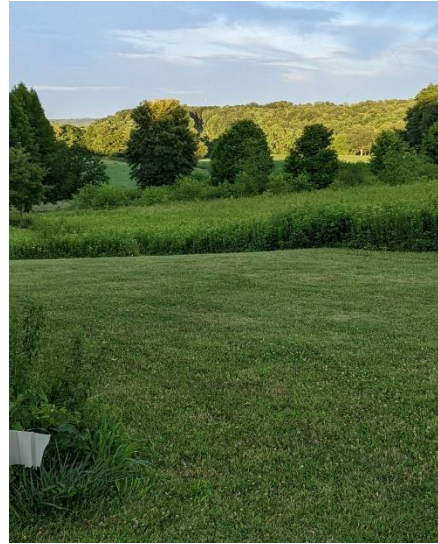


Thanks for the Hills

When the decision was made by the Heartland Board of Directors to close Templed Hills at the end of the 2024 Camping Season, I knew I needed to be a part of the staff for the closing summer season. I fell in love with this camp several years ago when I accidentally fell into the opportunity to serve as the Off-Season Cook for the past two years. The Off-Season Cook prepares the meals for groups that come to Templed Hills during the weekends and sometimes during the week depending on the program being hosted all other times of the year.



I had never worked the Summer Camp Session as their cook, as an arthritic knee and back, along with bouts of sciatica in my right hip kept me from believing I would be able to work as hard as needed to be successful. But with a supportive doctor who gave me enough pain killers, I was able to experience the beauty that is found at Templed Hills in the summer. The opportunity to serve with an international staff from Germany, Great Britain, Spain and Mexico, along with the rest of the regular Templed Hills staff was extremely rewarding.

I personally saw the wonder of our summer campers finding joy and God among the Hills. From the natural wooded beauty and wildlife that you find yourself immersed in, to the camaraderie and new friendships formed, along with discovering our God in a different place besides the typical church building, the Hills provided the perfect setting to develop and strengthen one's faith, regardless of age. Most of all, everyone made special memories to last a lifetime and many shed tears upon leaving, knowing that it will be another year until such a special experience will be available.

While I came home from the Hills, exhausted, tired, and sore, I would do it all over again in a heartbeat. While the work was extremely hard, it was so fulfilling to witness how the experience of the Hills shaped campers and staff alike. Those of us who have the experience to be a camper, counselor, director, or other support staff know the uniqueness and love you have for camp. Those of us that have been privileged to work for camp whether as a volunteer or staff, stay and work because

of our passion for the Outdoor Ministry that occurs at camp every year... a ministry that is hard to truly describe but who's impact, and importance is felt throughout the conference.

While Templed Hills seems like the closing of a good book, the final chapter of Outdoor Ministries, **it is not**. Outdoor Ministries of the Heartland Conference has already found other camps around the state and local area to continue the awesome faith journey that comes from being at camp. While the final chapter of Outdoor Ministries at The Hills may be finishing, new chapters of Outdoor Ministries are soon to be drafted next summer and beyond.

In the meantime, for those of us who have fond memories of The Hills, please consider attending a special event that is planned for **November 16th at Templed Hills**. On the 16th we will come together to reminisce about our experiences, but more importantly to say, "Thank You!" for the memories and making a difference in my life. More information regarding Templed Hills final event on November 16th will be forthcoming. Let us gather to say "Thank You for the Hills" one last time and celebrate the new chapters of the Heartland Conference's Outdoor Ministry yet to come.

Mark Vaughn

Member of the NWOA Witness and Proclamation Team

