

Corvettes and Turtles?

A wise man once said, "Every society is judged by how it treats its less fortunate." In 2003, the Pomona Valley Corvette Association in Southern California began a search for a worthy charity for the club to support. President Ansel Boyce assigned Vice-President and Car Show Chairman Randy Dimit to submit recommendations of various charities. The Painted Turtle Camp was under construction in Lake Hughes, CA and fit our criteria. PVCA chose The Painted Turtle as our charity because it realizes the dreams of children with chronic and life-threatening illnesses.

The Painted Turtle is the only multi-disease medical camp on the West Coast and is part of the Association of Hole in the Wall Gang Camps. Actor, racer and philanthropist Paul Newman's initial grant allowed for the purchase of the unique 183-acre setting. The rough and tumble environment helps to create a normal camp experience. The lake and the Adirondack chairs with the seat backs constructed to look like fish combine fun and functionality. The wood and stone buildings and the naturally wild and unruly landscape make the camp's design embody a true "regular camp" experience for the children. Even though not noticeable, the entire camp is wheelchair accessible.

The "Well Shell" best identifies the essence of The Painted Turtle Camp experience. It is the medical hub of the Camp. The building's Turtle shape only hints at what an amazing facility this is. The interior is not a "hospital-looking" hospital. "Tree-age" (triage) is set up in the image of a forest; tree murals cover the walls and the doctors provide treatment and make medical assessments from their tree-stump chairs. There are large leather loungers overlooking the lake for the campers undergoing dialysis or requiring other stationary medical care. Each cabin in the village is equipped with a special drainage system in the floor that allows campers on peritoneal dialysis to receive treatment in their bunks overnight. All necessary medical procedures are scheduled to allow campers to enjoy the maximum outdoor recreation experience, spending as little time as is necessary in the "Well Shell."

Each week of the camp session is designed to be disease specific. Possibly for the first time, many of these children are just like their peers. Campers receive superior medical care while at camp because of the partnerships the Camp has developed with the medical community. Disease-specific camps allow for California's top pediatric doctors and nurses to volunteer for camp sessions in the areas in which they specialize. Over fifty percent of the campers live at or below the federal poverty level and the medical care they receive at camp is frequently superior to their normal at-home care. Like all Hole in the Wall Gang Camps, The Painted Turtle has no billing department.

Rosemary Rodriguez, a member since 2003, started the PVCA Sewing Circle. Thousands of turtle-shaped pillows and bunk quilts have been hand made by The Los Angeles Area Quilting Guild and other Sewing Circles like PVCA's. Campers take home their turtle-shaped pillow and bunk quilt as a positive reminder of their camp experience.

PVCA's first year of fundraising was busy. We promoted our car show at other shows and Corvette events, and even worked an auto auction at the California Speedway. Our first show was held inside a skating park's air-conditioned building and their parking lot. Our 50-50, raffle and silent auction were successes. A local group of law-enforcement personnel, who formed a band years ago aptly named "Thief," donated their talents to our show. Our 2003 car show and other activities allowed PVCA to earmark our \$9,000 donation for the purchase of paddleboats. We could visualize campers on the lake, creating the memories that will last their lifetimes. Bennett Cerf said it best: "Laughter is the best medicine." We wanted our donations to be used to create fun and pure joy for the children. Our first "Turtle Tour," check and turtle pillow presentation, was held before the camp opened for its first session in June 2004.

The 2004 All-American Car and Truck Show was moved to Historic Downtown Upland by Show Chair Dave Armas. In cooperation with the Downtown Upland Merchants Association, we traded "man hours" by working at their annual Lemon Festival's beverage booths in exchange for closing down six square blocks of the city. Setting up a mini-car show at their weekly Market Night helps to publicize the car show and provides the merchants with an additional draw. This weekly activity gives our members a chance to socialize and show their vintage cars that cannot frequent our more spirited runs. The 2004 All-American Car and Truck Show became the largest publicly-held event for the benefit of The Painted Turtle Camp. Our fun-filled day included a live band, International Chili Society Cook-Off, Poker and Gimmick Rallye, exhibitions by local children's groups and an autograph session by three-time Olympic Gold medalist Leah O'Brien-Amico. We were able to raise additional funds through our silent auction, 50-50 and raffle. Our club members were thankful for our success and voted to fully fund the 2005 Fishing and Boating program with our \$20,000 donation. Our Sewing Circle brought more than 100 turtle pillows when we made our 2005 Turtle Tour. The camp had experienced a full summer and fall's camp sessions and we were all amazed at the changes since our last official visit.

Few people in Southern California are aware that a Hole in the Wall Gang Camp exists here. We held a public awareness event at the Irwindale Speedway's 2005 Southwest Tour Race. Selling car-show event shirts, collecting donations and showing the camp video increased the race spectators' awareness. PVCA members were able to exhibit their Corvettes to race fans at a mini car show and during a "Turtle Speed" lap on the track. Special thanks go out to Southern California's only half-mile super-speedway. Our 2005 All-American Car and Truck Show was bigger and better. Historic Downtown Upland graciously closed down eight city blocks and allowed for an even larger event. Our small-town, tree-lined streets, wonderful restaurants and shopping created a welcome atmosphere for car-show enthusiasts and their families, too! The 2005 Car Show and other fundraising events enabled us to sponsor the 2006 Fishing and Boating Programs and contribute to the lake reclamation project at the camp with our \$25,000 donation. 2005 Car Show Chairman Duane Stidham, in cooperation with Big Lots, was able to fulfill many of the items on The Painted Turtle wish list through a combination of discounts and outright donations. PVCA's \$5,000 was well spent. This year's Turtle Tour included the more than 100 turtle pillows contributed by the PVCA Sewing Circle.

2005 President Brent Hicks and his wife Marilyn have been financial supporters of the Painted Turtle Camp. The Hicks have secured the donation of dairy products for the camp's needs through 2007 from Select Milk Producers of New Mexico and West Texas. Since 2003, Brent and Marilyn have hosted an annual brunch to help raise additional charity funds. Brent is a partner in the accounting firm GLY DeCauwer and they have been major cash contributors to our fund for several years. Other club members have solicited private donations on behalf of the Camp.

The impact the Camp has made on our membership has been profound. Our involvement has sparked a passion for The Painted Turtle Camp that has changed our own lives in the process of helping enrich the lives of these children and we have created great memories during our journey. PVCA membership has donated over \$65,000 in goods, services, and cash since 2003. PVCA remains the largest single non-corporate donor organization to The Painted Turtle. For information about The Painted Turtle Camp, please refer to the link from our web site at www.pvca.org.

"Corvettes and Turtles"...Look what they can accomplish together!

Article was submitted by E. S. of PVCA.