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Q&A w/ Kayla Hardage

Executive Director of Camp Tanako

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Kayla Hardage is the new Executive Director at Camp Tanako in Hot Springs. Hardage, who grew up in White Hall now lives and works at Camp Tanako full-time. In the last 10 years, she has worked for the Arkansas Department of Parks, Heritage and Tourism. She took some time this week to answer a few questions about her life and her new role at Tanako.

Why did you decide to apply for the Director position at Tanako?

Funny story...My Mom and I were headed to Prescott to visit my grandparents and we were passing exit 97 on I-30 (the Tanako exit) and I told her that I wanted to work at Tanako again, like volunteering for work days or events. We continued talking about camp memories, as we had both worked on college staff. That evening, Kim Carter put on Facebook that she was leaving as Executive Director. I was not looking for a job, but my gut told me to apply, so I did!

What does a typical day as Director look like for you?

One thing that I love about this job is that there is no telling what the day will bring! Sometimes it's good news, or sometimes there is a tree over the road, but whatever it is, we all have a good laugh. We have to work as a team, and teamwork is what makes camp a great place to work.

Now that the COVID-19 pandemic has made it impossible to hold in-person camp this summer, what kinds of programs and activities is Tanako planning to help people stay connected?

We are launching a new program called TANAKO TALES, where we will take a few minutes each week through our social outlets, to reminisce on memories of camp, sing camp songs and share the good news of Jesus Christ!

What is something good that you can see coming out of this pandemic?

We feel that people will be hungry for fellowship with their community, and as a place for rest and renewal, we are hoping to offer retreats this fall. Tanako is known for the wonderful camps over the last 72 summers. Our hope is that we can grow into a year-round facility for groups, retreats, and conferences. We want to engage the local community and let them know we are here for them, too!

What is your favorite thing about Camp Tanako?

Being present in this place! There is nothing better than watching a sunrise over the lake, or a night at the fire pit with the sounds of nature and camp tunes on a guitar.

Who is someone that has influenced your life in a major way and why?

My greatest influences growing up were my four great grandmothers. I was lucky enough to have a relationship with all four women. Three were United Methodists, and I grew up going to church with all of them on the weekends and we had bunkin parties. I did not realize until later in my 20s that this was truly a gift. I knew six of my eight great grandparents and all four of my grandparents and had a relationship with all of them. These four women laid the foundation for who I am today!

Do you have any big plans for Tanako's future that you can share?

As I walk through the grounds, I dream of the possibilities of this special place. In my brief time here, I have looked into similar camps, both Methodist and not, and have decided I want to work on a 10-year plan. This plan includes a lodge and conference center, bike trails, partnerships with local businesses for experience trips for our campers, but above all, stay true to our mission of being a place set apart from the busy lives we live. Our foundation is summer camp, and I want that to stay the same.

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