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Carrie Gerstenhaber, laughing, said farewell to friends on alumni day, July 12, at Camps Equinunk and Blue Ridge in Equinunk, Pa. Chris Korman for The New York Times

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Following in Small Footsteps: Children Go to Parents' Camp

By DAVID KOEPEL

Gary Tucker could hardly wait to get to summer camp. He was looking forward to playing roller hockey and seeing his old buddies again.

His wife looking forward to it, too.

Mr. Tucker, 39, and Beth Tucker, 31, are so loyal to their old camps, Equinunk and Blue Ridge in Equinunk, Pa., that they went back for alumni day on July 12 and will return again at the end of this month, to serve as judges for a three-day sports competition.

"It's difficult to put into words what camp means to us," said Mr. Tucker, who spent 17 summers there and met his wife in 1996 at a joint reunion for the camps (Equinunk is the boys' camp, Blue Ridge is the girls'). "There's a shared history, and friendships that are the closest I've ever had."

Mr. Tucker's parents also met at the camp. So although Gary and Beth have moved from Long Island to Boca Raton, Fla., they hope their 19-month-old son, Jake, will be a third-generation camper at Equinunk.

The Tuckers aren't alone in their adult ardor for camp life. Many alumni who spent their summers in the Catskills, Poconos or Berkshires maintain close ties to their former camps.

Savvy camp owners recognize that cultivating alumni can be good for business. Many camp Web sites now have alumni sections and message boards to keep former campers apprised of news.

Happy camp alumni can be counted on to volunteer their time and talk up the camp to friends. But, most important, they send their children and grandchildren back to the camp they loved.

Equinunk alumnus Robert Butwin, 39, of Hewlett, N.Y., never doubted that his two children would someday attend his camp. They often accompanied him on camp visits and became comfortable with the surroundings at an early age. In 2000, at age 9, Samantha Butwin was given a choice: she could attend her father's old camp or opt for her mother's, Camp Green Lane, also in Pennsylvania. Her familiarity with Blue Ridge made the choice simple, even if it left her mother somewhat disappointed.

"She sometimes jokingly still calls me a traitor," Samantha said.

Now 12, and in her fourth summer at Blue Ridge, Samantha revels in camp life as much as her father did 25 years ago. Mr. Butwin said he enjoys knowing that his daughter and his son, Brandon, 8, are playing on the same fields and swimming in the same lake he did. And he admitted that seeing his daughter perform in a camp show brought him to tears.

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