



Culture

Ethiopian-American Kids and Their Families Enjoy 4 days of Camp in Virginia

by Ababu Taye

Held at the beautiful pastoral setting that is Massanetta Springs in Virginia's Shenandoah Mountains, the Ethiopian Heritage and Culture Camp provided a great occasion for about 60 families to enjoy a long weekend (Thursday July 21 through Sunday July 24) of family fun and camaraderie while enveloped in Ethiopian culture.

The highlight of the 4-day camp was the Saturday banquet, which included a boisterous traditional party where youngsters, their parents, and even some grandparents grooved to traditional Ethiopian music provided by a live band.

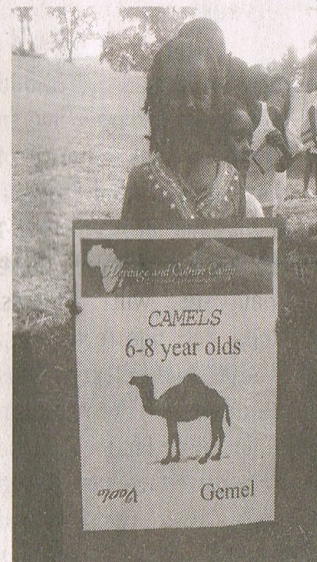
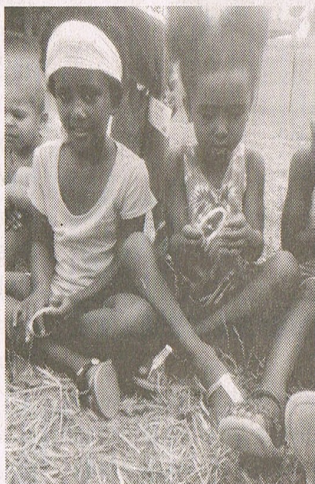
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Besides workshops for parents raising bicultural children, there were art exhibits, a time to enjoy a camp fire, as

well a time for a dip in a beautiful outdoor swimming pool. Many families also took time for a relaxing stroll at the bucolic 200 acre setting that is centered on a large pond fed by a natural spring. On Saturday, kids had a chance to ride a pony bedecked as an Ethiopian cavalry horse, while everyone was attending the Gebeya (Ethiopian marketplace). There were classes in Amharic, Ethiopian music and cooking,

workshop on Ethiopian etiquette, where kids learned how to show respect to their elders and the right way to greet each other was also part of the program.

Now in its third year, the camp has grown bigger each time. The founder and director of the camp is Mekdes Bekele, a native of Ethiopia who started it because she believed such a camp was essential to ensure that Ethiopian-American



"It does not matter who is raising these children, it is important for them to learn about their culture and to get to know their peers, while being exposed to adult role models who come from the same background."

Everyone at the camp was excited about celebrating Ethiopian culture, and dressed in traditional outfits for the banquet and group picture. Beyond hearing the sound of Ethiopian music and appreciating the smell of great Ethiopian food, kids also had the chance to hear about the long and proud history of Ethiopia and some of its outstanding historic figures.

The four-day event was covered by the Washington Post as well as the Harrisonburg Daily News-Record and local TV channels.

and a demonstration of the coffee ceremony A

kids are exposed to their heritage and culture.

She strongly feels that a camp such as this one benefits all families

raising Ethiopian-American children. According to Mekdes,