



2020: A Different Year!

As you can imagine, the pandemic changed everything for DRG. We would love to report 1000+ campers this summer, hundreds trusted Christ, and many significant decisions in their walk with God. But that was not the case. Instead, **overnight camp programs were cancelled** and most spring and fall **guest groups cancelled**. But this was no surprise to God. He provided other ways to **serve, engage** with the local community, and **plant many seeds**, the **fruit** of which we are sure will be seen next year and beyond.

Spring was full of **uncertainty** as guest groups cancelled and as we tried, against an evolving situation, to make decisions about summer camp, staffing, finances, and possible alternatives such as day camps or family camps. But the lack of guest groups also gave extra time to get more caught up on **maintenance and projects** and be ready to serve whomever God would bring.

By early **June**, as TN issued guidelines to **reopen** the economy, we were able, with appropriate precautions, to open Saturday **Day Quest** events as scheduled and even add 4 more dates, for a record total of 14 (from mid-June to mid-September). This event is for families, church groups and company picnics to come for the day to enjoy the lake activities, climbing tower, and train, Unimog 4x4 and horseback rides. It has always been a great way to **engage** with the community and **share DRG's ministry**. Most ride the train and the narration (usually by Mark) includes information about DRG's mission and programs in which campers, while doing adventure activities, also learn about "life's greatest adventure, which is knowing Jesus Christ and living your life for Him".



Up in the trees at *Family Camp Getaway*

June also continued the scramble to **rethink/retool**. Family camp is a very different paradigm than youth camp with many details to work through, including keeping it "safe". But this was done in time to offer **Family Camp Getaway** during 5 weeks of July and early August, with flexible dates and pricing.

And finding family groups to be the primary "safe" mode for guests, DRG was also still able to hold the annual **Father/Son Retreat** in September. It turned out to be a great weekend, filling the reduced capacity of one family per room.

Looking to the fall, with continued loss of most guest groups, the idea for another family-centric event, a corn maze, was also hatched (or planted rather!) in June, in time to plant the corn. Then as the corn grew, amidst *Day Quest*, *Family Camp* and *F/S Retreat*, there was to plan and prepare for **The Maze of Life**. This launched the weekend after Father/Son and ran six (very full!) weekends, Fri/Sat/Sun, thru November 1.

MoL offered many other **fall festival** items as well: hay rides, pony rides, petting zoo, a café with comfort food, warm beverages and yummy desserts, and of course scenic train rides. Those entering the maze received a small New Testament which was needed to look up scripture to answer questions posted at points to then choose the correct path. These had a custom cover with the DRG/maze logos and on inside flaps info about DRG and a **Gospel presentation**, also referring to verses within.

At dusk, the event transformed to *Beware of the Bear* with some scary (and silly) surprises in the maze. Then the train took riders to a specially lit location in the gorge where a brief devotional drew on the experience in the dark maze to **share the Gospel**.

The hard work paid off and *Maze of Life* was very successful. It drew in many new people to know about DRG and hear about Jesus. And it ended a challenging and uncertain year on a high note, where we have seen God still guide and provide.

- **661** campers transferred their registrations to 2021
- **142** (43 families) attended *Family Camp* or *F/S Retreat*
- **3600** attended *Day Quest*, **5400** attended *Maze of Life*
- **16** students served as resident summer staff, with 6 staying on thru the fall, plus many local volunteers

Family News

Winter / Spring

The kids continue **homeschool** with **Jon** (12th grade) fully **dual-enrollment** at Northeast State and Milligan College and **Kate** (11th grade) a mix of Elizabethton co-op and Milligan DE.

Nancy continues as Speech Language Pathologist (SLP), 3 days a week at Central, a nearby Carter County school.

Holidays: Thanksgiving with family in PA. Christmas at home.

March: **Spring break trip to PA** to visit Mom M and ministry partners. While there COVID-19 concerns grow and the day after we return home, Mom's care facility goes into lockdown.

Lockdown: The kids' DE **classes move online**. Schools stay closed after spring break, but Nancy's company moves quickly to implement **teletherapy** and she serves her students from home, though some are unable or choose not to continue online. DRG staff are considered "essential", so Mark continues to work on-site.

Graduation: **Jon completes high-school!**



Our Graduate!

Summer

Jobs: The kids expand their part time **work at TennTek** (a subcontractor to Snap-On Tools, making parts for ratchets). And with minimal DRG summer staff this year, they (and many other volunteers) **help staff Day Quest** each Saturday.

Teletherapy enables Nancy to continue serving a few students.

Vacation: CANCELLED. We had planned some camping in New England after a family gathering in PA for Mom's 90th birthday. This was reduced to a family gathering with Mom via Zoom.

Fall

Nancy continues **SLP** work at Central, 3 - 4 days a week, with a mix of on-site and on-line therapy.

Jon had chosen to attend UT Chattanooga to study engineering. UTC announced plans to have campus open for the fall semester, but given the ongoing uncertainty he elects to defer a year and continues to work at TennTek full time.

Kate (12th grade) resumes DE classes with Northeast State. These moved online, so homeschool is, for now, still AT home! She also earns her driver's license and continues at TennTek.



The train lit for night-time rides during *Beware of the Bear*

"Training"

The loss of camps and groups did NOT mean there was nothing for the staff to do. It was a lot of work to pivot and plan all new events and (for Mark) implement related online registration and business flow items. There were also facility changes due to COVID. One, that Mark was involved with, was the Sidetrack Café which had to be totally reconfigured to serve through the windows rather than from inside.

And regardless of full camps or none, there are many regular seasonal tasks. One major spring item for Mark is RR track inspection and repairs. A big blessing was two volunteers who travelled from KY, in spite of rising COVID numbers, to spend most of two weeks assisting with this process.

The added *Day Quest* dates and the new *Maze of Life* events also resulted in the train making over 50% more trips this year than usual, which kept Mark and the volunteer train crew extra busy! And the night-time trains, something new, also required adding lights which kept Mark occupied for several days.

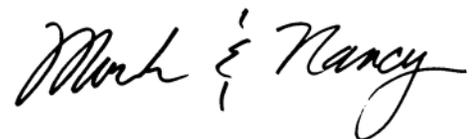
The exciting *Christmas Train* project, shared last fall, had to be put on hold this year due to COVID. But volunteers were able to continue restoration of the steam locomotive. And they kept Mark busy as "gofer" for parts, materials and tools. It is now nearly complete and made a test run in October!

Thanksgiving

Given the present situation, Thanksgiving and Christmas will be at home. But in the midst of a challenging year we still have much to be thankful for. In particular, we have remained **healthy** and **employed**, something taken for granted most years.

We are thankful for God's wisdom and provision in keeping DRG open and **servng**. And as always we are thankful for **your** prayers and partnership!

Gratefully,



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We'd enjoy hearing from YOU! Drop us an e-mail here.