

# RTs Participate in Summer Camps for Vent-Dependent Kids

With the last day of school just around the corner, children everywhere are looking forward to what has almost become a rite of passage in the American childhood: a week of fun, sun, and new friends at summer camp. Ten or 15 years ago this experience was pretty much limited to so-called "normal kids" - those without medical conditions requiring careful monitoring and care. However, as the pictures on the following pages illustrate, that's no longer the case. Thanks to caring health professionals and the generous support of corporate and other sponsors, even the most medically fragile children are now able to take part in the fun.

## RTs play a major role

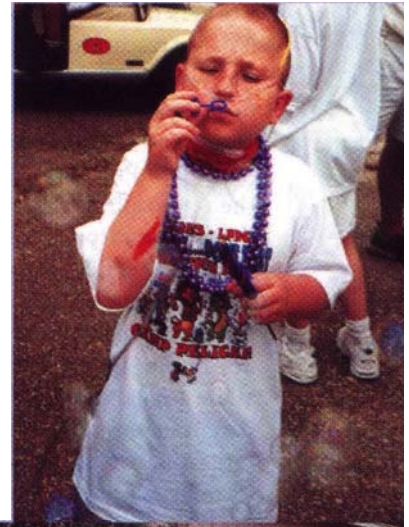
Fun is definitely the chief objective at the annual Trail's Edge Camp, says Mary Dekeon, RRT, respiratory therapy department director at the University of Michigan Medical Center and co-founder of one of the three camps featured here. The camp, which serves about 30 children every year, grew out of a support group sponsored by Dekeon and a nurse back in the late 1980s. "It was actually a parent's idea," says the therapist. "She was desperately in need of respite from her son's care but wanted him to be somewhere where he would be safe and well-cared for, but having fun."

Today the camp is essentially run by the respiratory care department at the University of Michigan Medical Center. "Over half the cabin leaders are RTs," explains

Dekeon. These therapists (along with health professionals from other medical fields who make up the balance of the cabin leaders) serve as the traditional `camp counselors' responsible for team building and overall cabin unity. Other respiratory therapists and RT students act as partners for the young campers, sharing the camp

experience with them on a one-on-one basis throughout the week.

The other two camps in our photo essay -Camp Pelican, which is run by the Lion's Club of



Louisiana, and a camp sponsored by Sick Kids need Involved People (SKIP), a support group started by parents of technology-dependent children in Louisiana - operate in much the same fashion. The large medical staffs at both regularly include respiratory therapist volunteers who donate their time and talents to ensure a fun week for all.

## Financial support makes it happen

One of the best things about all these camps is that they are volunteer efforts and, as such, come at little or





no cost to the families of the campers. Staff time is, of course, only one of the costs involved in holding a camp for technology-dependent kids. So where do these camps get the financial support necessary to stay in business?

Support comes from a wide variety of sources, but all of these camps got a boost last year from a corporate sponsor from the respiratory care industry. Viasys (formerly Thermo Respiratory Group) helped to fund Trail's Edge, Camp Pelican, and the SKIP camp



through a special program begun in January of 2000, which has so far donated \$5,000 to these camps and two others.

"We wanted to give something back to the respiratory community, our customers, and more importantly, the patients who rely upon our products every single day," says Becky Mabry, RRT, the company's vice president of marketing. "These organizations



offer an extremely valuable service to a group of extraordinary people." 01

