

CAMP BROMBAL

The creation of 'Camp Brombal' was the result of members of the Community Services Branch recognizing a need in the community for better relations between young people and the police. The officers also recognized that in many cases the difficulties were between the police and youth from less fortunate situations. As a result the officers looked for a program that would both educate and offer youth an opportunity to learn more about policing, and the Officers behind the uniforms. After lengthy discussions the officers decided to offer an opportunity to students from the Grade 6 VIP Program to attend a weeklong summer camp with police officers.

Arrangements were made for a campsite at Point Pelee National Park and a schedule of daily activities was developed to educate the youth and keep them busy and entertained. Officers were recruited to be counselors and cooks. The theme of camp would centre on the relationship between kids and Officers, breaking down the so called "Blue Wall". Once the programs were in place and a site identified there had to be funding as there could be no cost to the families of the youth who were selected to attend.

The officers approached community partners and corporations who were very excited and generous toward the idea. Officers decided one of the main fundraising efforts for the camp would be an annual hotdog day, and this tradition continues today with a "Hot Dog Day" held out front of Police Headquarters, where the Chief, Deputy Chiefs, Administrators and Officers sell the wares. The very first "Hot Dog Day" was a success and in July 2002 the very first camp was born.

A decision was made to first open the very first camp to children from the Windsor and Essex County Children's Aid. There would be forty-eight youth selected to attend, and they were split into two groups over a two week period. While the first camping experience was an overwhelming success, the committee of officers decided to expand their criteria and asked all school boards to identify children from the grade 6 VIP classes who would not otherwise have an opportunity to attend a camp.

With the success of the first camp Officers also realized the camp had to have a name. History would provide that answer and it was decided that the camp would be named after Nereo Brombal.

Constable Brombal was a member of the Windsor Police Department in the early 1930's and 1940. In 1940 with the height of the Second World War a new category had been added to the annual Police budget – "Subversive Activities". Among those targeted were people of Italian descent, almost 1500 strong at the time. This segment of the population was sometimes referred to as "Enemy Aliens". This affected one of the Windsor Police Department's own.

Constable Nereo Brombal had been born in Italy and in June of 1940 the City's "Board of Control" recommended that he be suspended indefinitely until the war was over. By this time Nereo had already served as an Officer for more than 12 years, yet he was dismissed and would never return to the service again.

It would not be until 1990 that the Commission finally apologized for firing Nereo. On December 11th, 1990, an official apology was given on behalf of the Commission to Nereo's son Douglas. Unfortunately Nereo had passed away in 1974 and never got the chance to hear the apology.

Officers with the Community Services Unit approached the Brombal family regarding their camp idea, and the Brombal's overwhelmingly agreed to the project and further offered their blessings.

During the first camp members of the Community Services Unit ensured attention was given to the food and treats made available to the campers. Not only were the meals nutritious, but care was taken to respect those campers with special religious or dietary concerns. The camp as a whole was meant to be an experience that would be remembered and in some cases would change the attitude in the community-police relationship for the campers.

During the camp the counselors kept notes and made observations on the campers identifying the participation, ability to make friends, willingness to help and leadership skills. On the last day those who excelled in the categories were identified and given a certificate. The counselors noted marked improvement in the children over the period of the week. This contest also acted as a method of evaluating the camp project. Also the overall operation of the camp was evaluated and improvements were made from the first to the second year. At the end of year number two the same evaluations were made and further changes would be forthcoming.

At the conclusion of the very first camp officers and counselors selected a camper who was identified as exhibiting the most congeniality, helpfulness and improvement. That camper in each of the first two weeks of camp received a bicycle. This idea would later be expanded, primarily due to long time sponsor Ted Farron, of Ted Farron's Gourmet Butcher Shop, who graciously insisted he be responsible for providing each child who attended camp with a free bike, helmet and lock. Ted would later comment, "I remember growing up and having a difficult childhood, so I just couldn't see only one child receiving a bike – They all had to get one".

The Officers realizing the momentum gained with the new camp quickly created a camp logo, which would proudly be displayed on tee shirts worn by the campers and volunteers. The shirts further allowed the service to display the logos of corporate sponsors, giving credit to the corporations responsible for the primary funding of camp.

Camp Brombal has an annual cost of \$20,000.00, with the cost of sending one child to camp \$400.00. As a result the Windsor Police Service continuously seeks the publics and corporate assistance in making the camp free for the children and their families.