

## SCHOOL &amp; FAMILY

# Mother turns grief toward helping other children

**Sally Butzin**

SPECIAL TO THE DEMOCRAT

I can't imagine the pain of losing a child, especially one whose life has barely begun. My friend Martha Weinstein suffered unbearable grief when her 5½-year-old son, Jesse Correia, died in 1988. For years she carried the pain of losing her young son.

And then she realized her son could live on through other children doing the things that Jesse loved so much. Jesse enjoyed the outdoors and was very happy camping and hiking. His school encouraged the arts, and he enjoyed acting in plays and loved to draw. Jesse's life had been enriched by his participation in Tallahassee Parks and

Recreation's Tumbling Tots program.

So in 2011, Martha established The Jesse Correia Memorial Fund to provide low-income children the opportunity to participate in the things that Jesse loved, like baseball, gymnastics, and arts and crafts. She planted the seed with the Tallahassee Parks and Recreation Department to offer a program for children who had nothing to do and no place to go during their schools' spring break week.

And then in 2014, the first Jesse Correia Spring Break Camp was born at the Walker-Ford Community Center. In addition to sports, games and crafts, the camp included segments on nonviolent communication, cooperative games and mindful living. Special guests came to inspire the children, including the mayor and a Supreme Court justice.

The camp provided supervised activities from 7:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m., as well as nutritious snacks and lunches.

And now there's really good news. Thanks to donations to the Memorial Fund, and with matching dollars from the Tallahassee Parks and Recreation Department, the 2017 Spring Break Camp will expand to two more community centers. In addition to Walker-Ford, there will be camps at the LeVerne Payne and Jack McClean centers.

Ashley Edwards, director of the Tallahassee Parks and Recreation Department, says, "We are thrilled to expand this wonderful project that Martha Weinstein started. Keeping kids safe while having fun is a win-win. We hope as funding increases, we can continue to expand Jesse's Spring Break Camps to include more and more kids."

"I must tell you that a piece of my heart has been restored to a place of peace because of these camps," Weinstein says. "To transfer my son's experiences into a program for our commu-

nity's youth makes my heart sing a new song."

If you would like to see these camps continue and expand next year, please join me in making a tax-deductible donation to Friends of Our Parks Foundation, 912 Myers Park Drive, Tallahassee, FL 32301. Be sure to note "Jesse Correia's Memorial Camps" on the memo line. For more information, go to [www.talgov.com/parks/parks-parks-foop.aspx](http://www.talgov.com/parks/parks-parks-foop.aspx).

Martha Weinstein makes my heart sing to see how she has turned her grief into good. Happily, she has gone from a bereaved mother to a gracious god-mother for many lucky spring break campers.

*Dr. Sally Butzin is a retired educator and community volunteer. She currently serves on the Citizens Advisory Board for the Tallahassee Parks and Recreation Department.*