

Families from All Parts of the United States Gather in Virginia to Enjoy 4 Days of Camaraderie and Fellowship at the Annual Ethiopian Heritage and Culture Camp.



Page B6

Culture

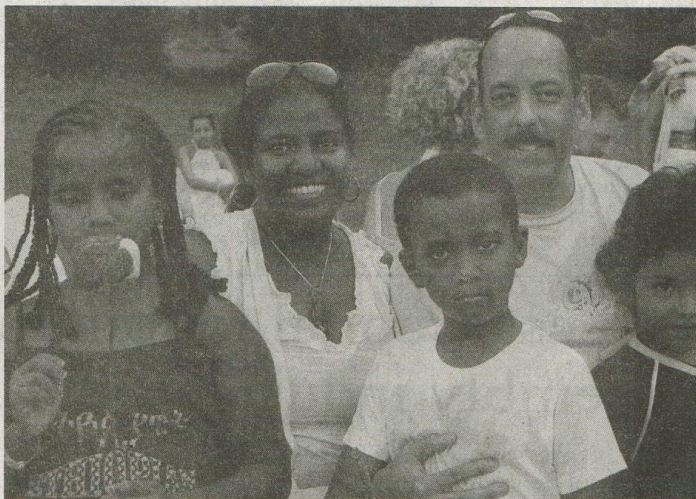
Families from All Parts of the United States Gather in Virginia to Enjoy 4 Days of Camaraderie and Fellowship at the Annual Ethiopian Heritage and Culture Camp.

The Ethiopian Heritage and Culture Camp 2010, held from July 22 – 25, 2010 was a great success, in every way. It was bigger and better than the previous year, with families coming from all over, including California, Arizona, Florida, Massachusetts, as well as the DC, Baltimore, Philadelphia, and New York areas. In spite of the record-breaking heat, campers came together to enjoy each other's company and immerse themselves in Ethiopian culture in even greater numbers.

The feedback is still coming in, and dare say, some of it with tears of joy. There were a lot of such joyous tears even during the camp itself. Parents appreciated their kids being in the majority for these four days vs. being the minority in their day-to-day life during the rest of the year.

It was particularly heartwarming to hear what the camp meant to the kids. For example, an Ethiopian mother wrote to the organization immediately after the camp and said her children have been thanking her so much for taking them to the camp. She said she heard this from her children multiple times. Another parent said that her daughter, who had previously rejected anything Ethiopian, told her during the camp, "Mom, can we come again next year?" Yet another parent said, "My older daughter said she wants to live here forever!"

Here is another gratifying comment that was received, "Again, thank you SO much for the amazing 4 days. Fiqir can't wait to come back and also asked yesterday if she could take Amharic lessons(!) Hooray. Thank you so much for all the hard work that makes that wonderful camp possible. We look forward to seeing you next year!" - Sara



Mekdes Bekele, Founder of the Camp said, "One of the unforgettable moments to me personally was at the Ethiopian Banquet where a parent came to me with tears in her eyes to tell me that this was the first time she had seen her daughter dance since the child came from Ethiopia three years before." Ms. Bekele further explains, "The fact that a child has not enjoyed something as simple as music and dance for that long was heart breaking. However, seeing that change in front of my eyes was worth the many long days and sleepless nights I spent getting ready for the Camp."

While the classes and activities are great reasons to attend the camp. The sense of community it provides to first-generation Ethiopian-American kids is priceless. According to a camp volunteer, "We

saw right there and then, the kids feeling confident, happy, belonging and loved."

The organizers of the camp had this to say, "As we reflected upon this year's camp, it became clear that this camp belongs to no one individual or small group alone. The success of our camp is a attribute to the collective efforts of every volunteer, sponsor, presenter, and parent that took the time to make a difference in the children's lives. We extend a heartfelt THANK YOU to all our families, volunteers, presenters, and sponsors."

The Heritage and Culture Camp will soon update their website (www.heritageandculturecamp.org) with pictures, feedback as well as links to media coverage.