



To The Wonderful Heart Family:

"I feel like I am trustee of this treasure (Heart O' the Hills) and I am trying to keep it going as best I can, so that I can pass it along."

Jane Ragsdale's words in a 2015 interview.

On November 5, 2025, the trusteeship of Heart O' the Hills Camp for Girls passed to Elisabeth and John Hay, Heart and Stewart camp parents.

Immediately after the flood, a former Heart camper told her daughter (sic) "Heart O' the Hills is more than a single camp director, buildings or a piece of property: it is the traditions, the life lessons, the friendships, the memories that make Heart so special. I had a different camp director than you, and there will be camp directors after Jane, but Heart will still be special. Heart is rooted in our hearts, in our blood, in our bones. It won't look the same, but it will always be the Heart."

The new location is on the North Fork of the Guadalupe, centered around historic Riverbend Lodge, once part of greater Camp Stewart property. Construction of new facilities is already underway. The new property is gorgeous, with abundant waterfront and all camp facilities well above any floodplain.

The Hays will contact you to tell you about their plans and registration for 2026. We could not be more excited about the future of Heart under their leadership.

John and Elisabeth are a wonderful couple, and parents to Heart and Stewart campers, Brooklyn and Cohen. John (*Chief #78*) is a longtime Stewart camper, counselor and camp advocate. Elisabeth is passionate about the benefits of camping as well as preserving the traditions that have served Heart over the past 72 summers.

Bailey McEachern, Monique Cikota and many key staff will be there to greet the 2026 campers. Rescued memorabilia is also being cleaned and transferred to the new location. *Change is inevitable, but the treasured traditions and memories stay constant.*

Heart will be as special going forward as it has been since its beginning in 1953, when Velma and Kenneth Jones opened the historic lodge as a camp, in memory of their teenage daughter, Jo.

You always know that the time may come when the camp needs new leadership, and you plan accordingly. Si and I focused our planning on ensuring the continuation of both Heart and Stewart.

The Ragsdale family had been in internal discussion about the need to ‘pass the torch’ at Heart for a few years, but the events of July 4 moved the needle forward.

John was one of the first people on site at Heart on July 5 with a skid-steer helping clean. Approximately a week later, he came to Jeepers and me with an offer to sell us his property, Riverbend Lodge, so Heart could relocate. After visits, we told John we would not buy Riverbend but would consider selling the Heart business to him; I was too old to start anew and Jeepers wanted to focus on Stewart. Without Jane, Heart needed new leadership and energy as well as a new site.

I feel this has been a God-driven journey, as so many things had to fall into place to make it happen. Riverbend initially was not large enough to meet the needs of a camp. John had to approach the property neighbor, Terri Pyle, with a request to buy her property. Ms. Pyle agreed with an understanding of the impact she would have by selling to John, and the next key component for the new site fell into place. Shortly after the land sale agreement, Ms. Pyle passed away.

I feel Jane is smiling, knowing a Heart family who genuinely loves camping is taking the camp she loved forward and I think she met Terri Pyle at the pearly gates with a “Thank you for making it possible for my camp to continue in such a beautiful safe location.”

The existing Heart property will remain in the family for the time being: Deen and his family, along with Artur and his family, continue to live there.

Next week the ‘old’ Heart will start sending refund checks for all deposits paid for 2026 and refunds for the fees paid for the July 2025 term. If you need a refund posted to your credit card rather than a check, please contact Monique. If the refund needs to be sent to someone other than the custodial parent, please also contact Monique.

When the Campminder transitions are completed, make sure you re-register for the most special summer in 2026! ***It will be a summer of new beginnings, based on the best of the past.***

Shortly after Jane’s death, we commissioned a special ‘Earli-bird’ charm honoring Jane from Jim Morris. **That charm will be mailed to all campers who were registered for the 2025 season. This is the Ragsdale family gift to you in memory of Jane.**

Since its inception as a camp, Heart O' the Hills has had four principle owners: the Jones (1953-1965); Carl and Diane Hawkins (1965-1976); Si and Kathy Ragsdale with partners Whayne and Bobbie Moore (1976-1987) and the Ragsdale family since then, with Jane Ragsdale as the director and face of the camp, as well as part owner. The Ragsdale family has been part of the ownership for 49 of its 72 years; Jane was director for thirty-eight years.

Today I feel the bitter sweetness of seeing a beloved daughter get married: the emotion of knowing she is no longer under your wings but stretching her wings to soar with her new partner. You are so excited for her yet know your life will never be the same.

Thank you to the July 2025 camper families for your patience as we worked out the future over the last four months.

There are no words to voice proper appreciation to those who worked tirelessly searching, cleaning and preserving what could be recovered after the flood. So many totally disrupted their lives returning to Heart, doing all they could to preserve items for future generations. Their love and toil were such a testament to the importance Heart and Jane played in their lives.

And my mother's heart overflows with appreciation for all the outpouring of love for my beautiful Jane: ***her spirit will always live not only at The Heart and the camping world, but especially in the hearts of your daughters, I trust.***

From my heart-

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'Kathy', with a small heart symbol at the end of the signature.

Kathy C Ragsdale, Chairman, Bob-Kat
November 6, 2025