

Camp RYLA 2023

ACACIA HUANG



What is Camp RYLA?

RYLA stands for Rotary Youth Leadership Award and Camp RYLA is a week-long intensive camp which is designed to improve and instill leadership skills in soon-to-be high school seniors. Campers are able to grow as leaders, develop life-long skills and genuine relationships to great people, and be welcomed to a supportive environment and network of amazing servant leaders. This year's camp theme was "Step Out of Your Comfort Zone."



My Cabin One

Each cabin was also assigned cabin themes to encourage team sentiment and enthusiasm! The themes were called back to when we did activities like cabin chants, the RYLA Olympics, and cabin flags. My Cabin was themed The Beatles. Over the course of the week, each cabin becomes tightly-knit. Inside jokes, unbreakable friendships, and unforgettable memories were made.



Camp Activities

Throughout the week, we participated in numerous activities! From Round Robin Ice Breakers to the infamous RYLA Olympics, all campers stayed mentally and physically engaged. I personally loved the obstacle course in which my cabin placed 2nd for shortest time spent. I particularly enjoyed how each cabin cheered each other on and showed great sportsmanship.



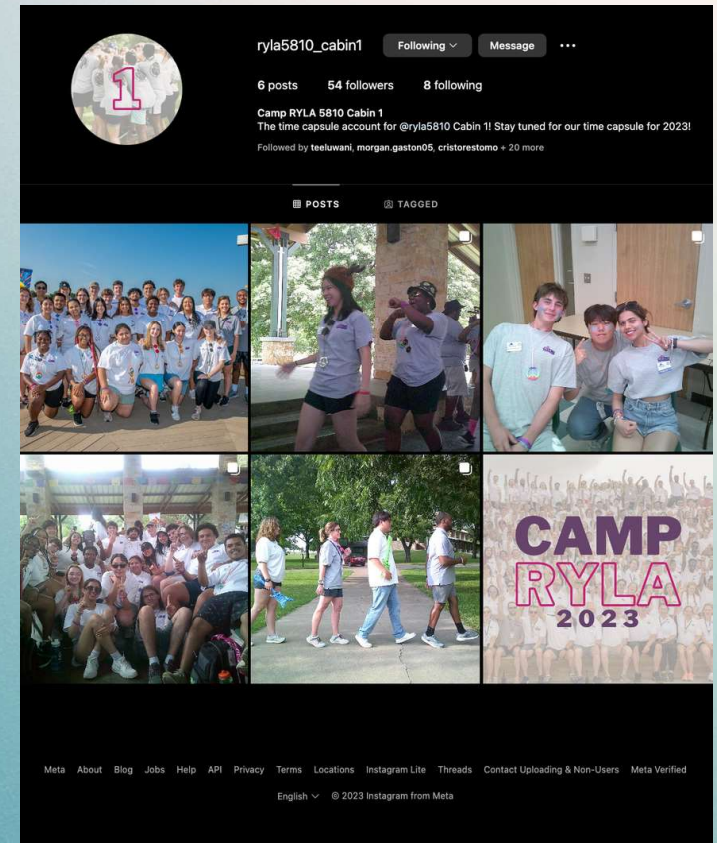
My Mentors

I would like to highlight 4 great people who were of great support to me both during and after Camp RYLA. First, my two counselors. Ross was the Cabin 1 Boy's counselor and Mich was the Cabin 1 Girl's counselor, but they both worked together harmoniously to provide support and nurturing to 26 campers, including myself. Captain Spencer Grzywacz is an officer in the Marine Corps and a RYLA Alumni who came back after several years to contribute to the community. Not depicted is Richardson-East Rotary's very own Chris Goodson, who accompanied Peter and I to the orientation and took us to and back from camp.



My Camp Committee

Campers are said to “run the camp itself” and gain experience by joining committees specific to the management of certain events or the assignment to a certain task. I was in the Cabin Capsule Committee, which was in charge of creating social media accounts (Instagram) that would encapsulate and summarize our cabin’s experiences and takeaways. Rushan, a now good friend of mine, and I worked together to create this page with the guidance of camp counselors who helped us take the photos while we were in action throughout the week.



My Favorite Camp Memory

I must've made hundreds of sweet memories at camp. Between the talent show, wood-panel breaking, RYLA Olympics, the annual RYLA volleyball tournament, reminiscing our day at camp during the debriefs in our respective cabins at night, I truly enjoyed every part of Camp RYLA.

One of my absolute favorite memories, however, was the bonfire night. On the last night of camp, campers are given the opportunity to really soak in every last bit of everything that RYLA had given them: friends, memories, leadership skills, and an incredible community. It was solemn but so sweet.



My Takeaways

RYLA taught me so much. I learned the importance of being perceptive to the people in my team and conditions around me, of being flexible and adaptable, of being able to fill any role that the team needs rather than always seeking the paradigm leadership position, and helping your team to play to everyone's strengths and support each other through working on our weaknesses.



What was Camp RYLA to me?

If I had to be quoted on what Camp RYLA is and what it meant to me, I would say, “RYLA is a family, a place of solace and love, and an experience that I am endlessly grateful for.”

As I reflect on my time in high school as I get closer to the finish line, I think fondly of Camp RYLA as one of my core, foundational memories. I can't begin to describe how important this experience was to me and how supportive the RYLA community is (though my mom heard just about 3 hours worth of straight passion about the camp from me, right after I got home). Just like Rotary, RYLarians are virtually everywhere - especially in the United States. There is a RYLarian in every career imaginable all connected by the core experience of being a RYLA camper. I value each and every relationship I made and cannot wait to see all the 2023 campers at Day 7 this weekend, to cap off our camper experience!



Thank you!