

Victory Junction with Mark Schumacher

Guests: Mark Schumacher – Chief Development Officer, Victory Junction | Alyson Nance – Project Manager, Pediatric Developmental Therapy

Victory Junction was inspired by the late Adam Petty. He and his father, Kyle Petty, were on a motorcycle trip through Florida when they stopped at Boggy Creek Camp which is a camp for children with serious medical challenges. Adam was so inspired that he felt it was his calling to bring a similar camp to the foothills of North Carolina. Passion drove him both on the track and in his desire to help others. Between races, Adam was often found in pediatric hospitals visiting children with challenging medical conditions. He also began saving money and developing the plans for the children's camp of his dreams. One year after his touching experience visiting children at Florida's Camp Boggy Creek, Adam Petty tragically lost his life in a racing accident at New Hampshire Motor Speedway. He was only 19 years old. This tragedy, though, created a swelling of emotion from the Petty family, their fans, and the Nascar community that really bolstered Adam's cause. Adam's legacy of love was realized when Victory Junction opened its gates to its first campers in June of 2004.

Coincidentally, Mark and his son were at the Boggy Creek Camp at the same time that Adam & Kyle Petty first visited. This was not realized, though, until Mark became a part of the Victory Junction team some time later. Mark was a journalist for 25 years. In 2007, though, he decided to change careers and with his son's experience felt the need to pursue Development Fundraising and supporting children's health issues. Mark's best friend eventually started working for Smithfield Foods, the main sponsor of Richard Petty Motor Sports. It was through this connection that Mark's name was mentioned to Victory Junction, and he joined their team.

Victory Junction is a secular camp by nature, but an optional worship service is available to campers and / or families on Sunday's should they wish to attend.

Camp is available to children ages six to 16. The Victory Junction experience is a welcome break for children who spend most of their year receiving medical treatments or attending countless hospital visits. Some of the illnesses served are bleeding disorders, heart disease, burn survivors, immunologic disorders, cancer, kidney disorders, cerebral palsy, lung disease, craniofacial anomalies, neurological disorders, diabetes, physical disabilities, gastrointestinal disorders, rheumatologic disorders, genetic disorders, sickle cell disease, and others.

Victory Junction is almost put at an inconvenience by calling it a camp, because it is really an entire 84-acre theme park. While the Victory Junction offers some of the camp "classics" like boating, fishing, archery, and horseback riding, there are a number of other fun-filled attractions including the 55-foot adventure tower, 2 zip lines, an incredible bowling center, race shop, water park, mini-golf course, petting zoo, and a host of others. One of Mark's favorite attractions is the Superdome which is an indoor softball/kickball field mini-stadium! The main focus of Victory Junction is to allow kids to not only focus on games and activities, but more importantly focus on what they *can* do.

Victory Junction is staffed with 45 full-time employees, mostly medical staff that work to prepare camp for year round activities for kiddos. In the summer, though, the Victory Junction team will expand to over 200 employees as well as volunteers. Summer Staffers, or counselors, are typically college students in their last year of undergraduate work or in their graduate studies. The minimum age to be a Summer Staffer is 19 years of age. Volunteers of all ages and specialty work throughout the summer to provide much needed help and support to the Victory Junction team. The number one requirement to work at Victory Junction is a love for the children they serve and a desire to ensure that every child that participates has one of the best experiences of their life while at Victory Junction. There is a growing number of summer staffers that are working at Victory Junction that were former attendees.

Summer staffers go through a rigorous 2-week training before any campers arrive to ensure they are ready to meet the needs and opportunities of every child that attends Victory Junction.

Unless it is a family weekend, parents do not attend Victory Junction with their children. Although it can be a challenging task for a parent / caregiver to leave their special needs child for a week, when parents and their children arrive at camp this is not the first time that the family and the camp are in contact. The Victory Junction medical team has been in communication with the family, as well as the child's physician(s), ahead of time to ensure every detailed has been prepared to properly accommodate and medically care for the child throughout the week's experiences.

It is Victory Junction's desire to make their experience available to any child. Parents / caregivers that are interested in their child attending Victory Junction need only to visit www.victoryjunction.org and fill out the online application. No medical referral is necessary for your child to be a part of the Victory Junction experience, although, upon filling out an application, the Victory Junction medical team will be in contact with your child's physician(s) to ensure that they are preparing appropriately for their fun weekend! Those that are interested in volunteering or being a Summer Staffer can also apply online at www.victoryjunction.org.

The Victory Junction medical team's base of operation is The Body Shop. It is a state-of-the-art medical facility and pharmacy equipped to handle everyday medical needs in addition to emergency situations. To make sure fun-filled days are not interrupted, scheduled medications are hand-delivered and administered. They work to keep camper time in the Body Shop to a minimum to maximize the fun! Also, all children are accompanied in a 1:1 ratio at Victory Junction, although certain medical conditions require 2:1 support for every child.

The camp weeks are structured to allow for focus for children with different medical challenges. There are specific weeks for diabetes, cerebral palsy, and so on. The maximum number of campers per each event fluctuates due to the required support ratio for each child and their medical condition.

Food at Victory Junction is served in their Fuel Stop dining area, and it is top notch! Chef Matt and his team prepare great meals that extend beyond the camp food "classics" of burgers and hot dogs. Also, Victory Junction has a fantastic system in place to meet the dietary needs and restrictions of each camper appropriately.

To learn more about Victory Junction, you can visit their website at www.victoryjunction.org as well as email Mark directly at marks@victoryjunction.org.