Counseling from the heart

Matthew Teague
Staff writer

GRAND COTEAU — Dusty Abshire considers himself "one of the lucky ones."
He first attended Camp Bon Corer when he was 16 years old, and now he's the camp's senior counselor at 22.
The camp, nestled in a grove of oak trees near the Sacred Heart Academy in Grand Coteau, is a two-week camp for children born with heart defects, and most campers have had at least one open-heart surgery.
"A lot of kids don't come back," said Norma Guildry, a member of the camp's board. "Dusty is really special."
Abshire is quiet and unassuming. "It's no big deal," he said. "I just like giving the kids the same opportunity that I had when I was a camper."
Abshire is now a student at USL, where he says he's taking life one day at a time.
"You can't walk around thinking, 'I have a heart defect. This could be my last day,'" he said. "You have to just put it out of your mind. You have to put it behind you."
Abshire said his ability to rise above his heart defect has made a difference in the way kids respond to him as a counselor.
"The scars are hard to get past for a lot of the kids," he said, referring to the scars that run along the sternum of those who have had open-heart surgery. "And when I took off my shirt to swim, they saw that I had had surgery, and they were shocked. Slowly, they all took off their shirts and we all started comparing scars. That was something they wouldn't have felt the liberty to do anywhere else."

Dusty Abshire sits in front of the Academy of the Sacred Heart where heart patients spend time at Camp Bon Corer.

The next two weeks, July 6-18, are for campers ages 5-11 and the last two weeks, July 20-Aug. 1, are for campers age 12-14.
Camp Bon Corer is the only camp of its nature accredited by the American Camping Association. Guildry said the camp has nurses on site, and doctors and ambulances on call 24 hours a day.
"We do our best to make the campers feel safe," Guildry said. "That gives them the freedom to do things that they may not be able to do at home or at other camps."

Guildry said that anyone who donates $25 or more to Camp Bon Corer is a Friend of the camp, $50 and up is a Donor, $100 or more is a Partner, $1,000 and up is a Sponsor, and anyone who donates over $5,000 is a Patron.
"Anyone who could give $25, that's fine," she said. "We can combine sponsorships, so every little bit helps."

Acadigua's Daily Advertiser
Monday, December 30, 1997
Pg. 1B
Column 2 Article 3