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# Camp Magic at Clapping Hands Farm *(Shoes optional!)*

by Audrey Bernier Schwankl



Down a country road near you, right here in Chatham County, there's a place where the magic of being a kid at camp is flourishing BIG time. Clapping Hands Farm is an Arts and Nature camp directed by founder, artist, and storyteller Louise Omoto Kessel and led/taught by other working artists, craftspeople and naturalists, along with interns, youth counselors and volunteers.

**“Everybody experiences love at this camp. That doesn’t just happen. It’s a focused priority.”**

*Teli Shabu,  
 teaching-artist,  
 drummer, storyteller*

Clapping Hands hosts up to seven week-long camps each summer, as well as a spring break camp (this year April 6–10) and other programs throughout the year. Campers say “You can learn ANYTHING in a week at Clapping Hands Farm!” but as Louise explains, “Stuff we do and learn at camp is dazzling, but personal connections are what carry the learning forward in

a transformative way.” Louise and company’s term for all this combined wonderfulness is that of “camp magic.”

The unassuming gravel lane that leads to camp off Alston Chapel Road moseys past apple trees, old barns, vegetable gardens and a pond Thoreau might fancy. As my kids and I made our way to camp the first time, I was glad to see a sign on the lane that assured us that we were on the right path. After passing the pond, the enveloping forest we entered was enchantingly undisturbed, but also seemed never ending. I now consider those endless meditative branches arching overhead to be a forest cathedral, and the perfect prelude to the otherworldly goodness of camp.

It is here where summer days are shared by joyful, exuberant people who are learning about each other and the world around them, while they do visual art, climb trees, listen to stories, play all kinds of games, sing songs, build forts and fairy houses, play music, dance, put on plays, make toys, write songs, poems and stories, make connections, problem solve, do chores, learn compassion, form strong, lasting, beautiful friendships and find out about just who they themselves are. Without devices. Outside. All. Day. Long.

Longtime teaching-artist, drummer, storyteller and mentor, Teli Shabu (of Liberia) says, “Everybody experiences love at this camp. That doesn’t just happen. It’s a focused priority. And that’s what I love about camp.” Louise adds, “Turns out being loved and supported and welcomed with all our quirks tends to bring out the best in all of us. So many people talk about camp as a

**“My love for camp is so big I can’t quite explain it!”**

*Lenore Ramos,  
 camper and counselor*



safe place and a place where they can be themselves.” The people at Clapping Hands want Everybody at camp. While encompassing ages ranging from two years old to adult, the staff and campers bring a spectrum of life experience and cultural heritage which is visible and celebrated. Families with specific challenges and

campers with special needs are welcomed. Ongoing fundraising supports a scholarship program which backs up Louise’s firm belief that “campers are our most precious resource and camp is stronger, better,

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## The Race is on for District 5 Commissioner

For the first time since 2010 the voters of Chatham County will have a choice for County Commissioner in District Five which was represented for two terms by Republican Walter Petty and currently by his replacement Andy Wilkie.

Franklin Gomez Flores and his team worked with the Chatham County Democratic Party and its Hispanic Caucus to obtain the legally required amount of signatures (2,148) from registered voters in Chatham County to appear on the ballot in the fall general election. The County Board of Elections ultimately certified 3,110 of the petition signatures which meant that Gomez Flores exceeded the requirement by 44.7%.

“Franklin Gomez Flores will bring youth and diversity to our county Board of Commissioners,” said Hispanic Caucus President Alirio Estevez. “People signed the petition because they believe Franklin will be a great option this November.”

Once the paperwork is completed and the filing fee is paid, Gomez Flores will appear on the ballot as an independent candidate residing in District Five.

When queried about his success with the petition, District Four Commissioner Jim Crawford (D) had this to say:

**“Franklin Gomez has already stepped forward to tackle the planning challenges of a rapidly growing community.”**

*Commissioner Jim Crawford*



“Chatham County and District Five need active and effective leadership. Franklin Gomez has already stepped forward to tackle the planning challenges of a rapidly growing community. Now he is ready to bring his energy to the board of commissioners. Vote Gomez. His time is now.”

If Gomez Flores is elected this November he would become the first Latinx member of the County Board of Commissioners and the second county-wide Latinx office holder after school board member Melissa Hlavac.

At 25 years of age, he would become the youngest elected official in Chatham County.

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