



Meet Jennifer Sweet, director of Hidden Valley 4-H Camp...

1. Describe Your Business:

Hidden Valley 4-H camp is a co-ed day and overnight camp for youth ages 5 to 16. The camp is located inside the Watkins Glen State Park, where it has been since 1945. The goal of the camp is to help campers gain independence, learn new skills, and create lasting friendships.

2. Tell us your story:

Jennifer grew up in the Schuyler County area, and graduated from the Odessa-Montour school district. After graduating from college, Jennifer moved to Philadelphia where worked for several years as a live-in nanny. After that, she taught vocal and instrumental music for 15 years in New Jersey and 2 years in Belgium. "During summers off, I worked at camp in the Adirondacks. I started as a counselor and worked my way into administration. My passion for teaching was waning, and my love for camps was growing," Jennifer described. "I worked really hard at working in leadership positions and camp leadership until I was confident enough in my abilities to leave teaching and move to full-time camp administration in 2013."

3. What has helped you succeed and gain experience?

Jennifer said that the camp directors she has worked for in the past have really helped her to gain experience and prepare her for her current role. "I always realized that I had a bigger impact on the kids at the camp than as a teacher," she stated. "Camp is fun and it's supposed to be fun. And parents' context of camp is fun and safe." She went on to say that having the positive context of camp and what it does for youth is what helps drive her. "It's not a class they have to take," she explained. "They choose to come to camp. It's a lot more rewarding as an individual and professional."

4. What inspires you?

"They will laugh and hoot and holler about this, but for the most part it is my camp staff and campers that inspire me," Jennifer said. "They inspire me to grow professionally so I can be a better camp director for them. And they inspire me to continue to make Hidden Valley 4-H Camp a place they call their home."

5. What keeps you up at night? What are your challenges?

"I think the challenges are not necessarily knowing if we are the right fit for every camper," Jennifer said. "And when a camper is struggling at our camp that keeps me up at night because it means I haven't done enough for the family. I will wrack my brain trying to figure out how to help them. Watching a camper struggle is not an option. I don't even like to go to sleep if I know a camper is struggling. I'll stay up and try to work out how to help that camper."

6. What is your favorite local activity?

Jennifer said that she really loves to fish in this area. "I don't do it enough by far, but I love exploring the different places to go fishing around here," she said. "I really wish I could catch a fish on Seneca Lake! That's my favorite spot, but I have yet to catch a fish there!"

7. Is there anything else we should know about you?

"You know, I think people would be happy to know that I am so glad I came back home," Jennifer states. "I lived away for a while, I have some good memories here from childhood, but coming back has just made me appreciate this area that much more. There isn't a day that I don't drive into the Hidden Valley 4-H Camp where I don't feel grateful. I'm very grateful to be here and be charged with this camp."