



Experiencing God, Community and Nature

Camp Alexander Mack, Inc.

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To: The Camp Alexander Mack Community

From: Gene Hollenberg, Executive Director

Re: Esther and John Hamer Health Center

Date: November 23, 2020

Camp Alexander Mack is delighted to announce that the new health center, currently under construction, will be named in honor of Mrs. Esther and Dr. John Hamer, former Nigerian missionaries, lifetime members of the Church of the Brethren, and long-time volunteers at Camp Mack. The official name will be: *Esther and John Hamer Health Center*.

John passed away in January of 2019, and Esther resides at Timbercrest Senior Living Community. In a text conversation with Esther, she shared, “In the very early years, John would go up to Camp Mack and work with L. W. Shultz. In the wintertime when the lake was all frozen, John and L. W. would go to the lake and cut frozen blocks of ice and pack them close together to make an icehouse. Then in the spring and summer, when there was no ice, staff could open up this icehouse, and there was plenty of ice. I (Esther) worked in the kitchen with Mrs. Shultz one summer. They had these huge-sized dishpans, and we made oodles of cinnamon toast. I was one of the first ones to live in what was then called the ‘Staff House’ (Ulrich House now). It was my responsibility to clean that house, [and] various toilets on the campus grounds. It was that summer that Harry McNarry, the first Afro-American on staff, was sometimes available, and he and I would leave the camp to go to churches, and I accompanied him as he sang.”

John and Esther worked together as a doctor-nurse team in Nigeria from 1953 to 1969. They are remembered dearly by those in the villages they served. While there, they were instrumental in identifying a new deadly virus, and in so doing, enabled researchers to develop medical responses to help keep the virus under control. This is described in articles in the July, 1974 and June, 2020 issues of *Messenger*.

Those who have known Esther and John, also know of their kind and caring love for God, the church, and all people. Many recall their graciousness and warmth to all. Esther still delights in conversation and enjoys opportunities to engage with others whenever it is possible.

Construction on the health center began in late October and should be completed by late winter. It is part of the current capital campaign, *Planting the Future*, that will meet the future needs of Camp Mack’s guests by providing comfortable and accessible retreat space for all. The health center is the first part of the building phase that frees up space in Ulrich House as it also provides needed facilities to care for the health of campers during summer camps. The building will also share comfort with guests by providing clean and private restrooms in the center of camp.

Camp Mack provides a sanctuary where people connect with God, experience creation, and build Christian community. The Hamer family has lived their lives in harmony with this mission.

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