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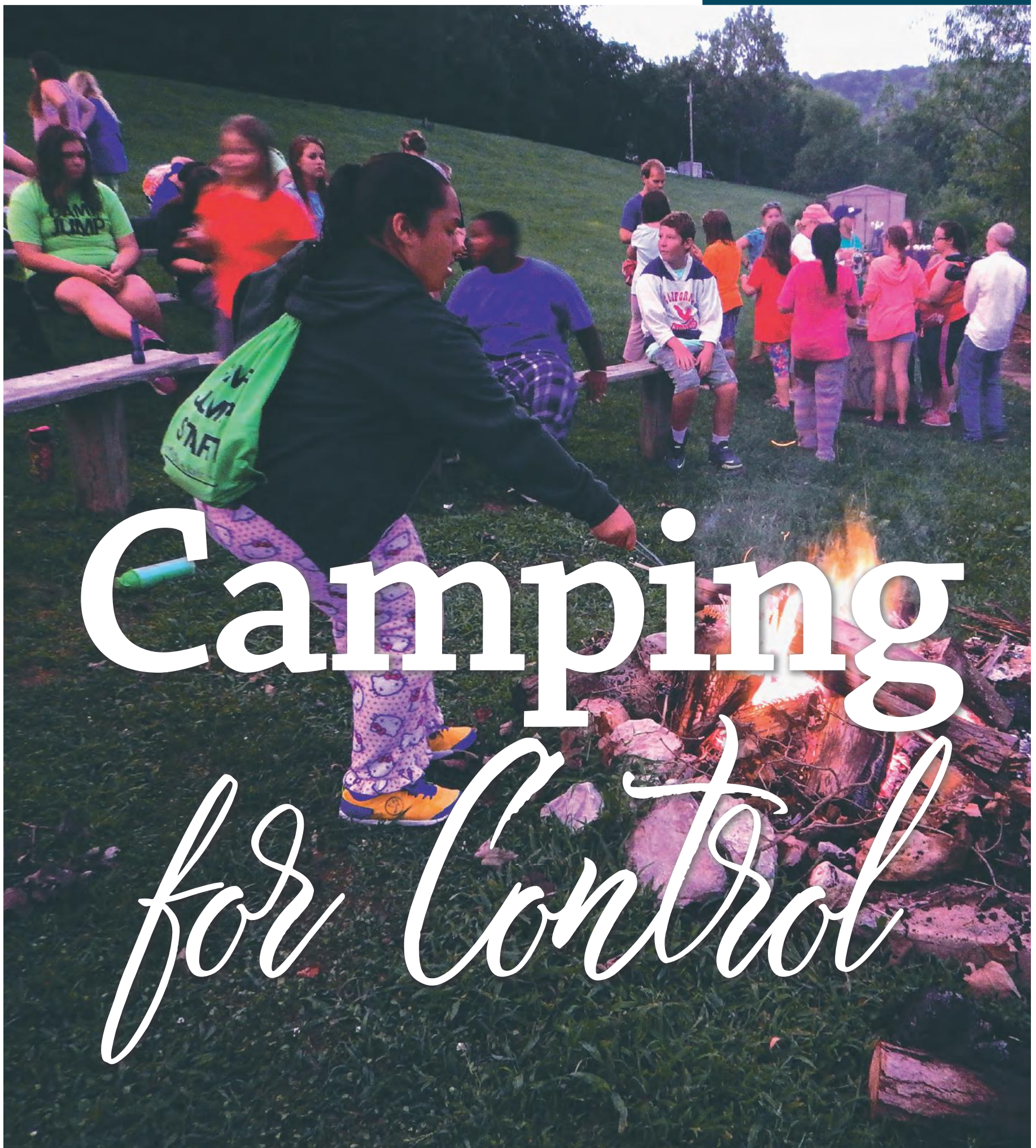
GAME ON!

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HYKEN'S HOMEWORK

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FEATURE:  
CAMP JUMP START



# Camping for Control

PHOTO COURTESY OF CAMP JUMP START



# Jumping-Off POINT

By Alice Handelman | Photos courtesy of Camp Jump Start





# Camp Jump Start in Imperial, Missouri, teaches adolescents to take control of their nutrition, exercise, health, happiness and so much more.



It's day one at Camp Jump Start in Imperial, Missouri. Camp director and nurse Jean Huelsing asks her campers to name the coolest cars they have ever seen. The kids, ages 9 to 18, shout out: "Bentley!" "Ferrari!" "Lamborghini!" "Rolls-Royce!" She then asks if they would ever put regular gas in those automobiles. They respond loud and clear: "No! It will ruin the engine."

"Now let's compare the fuel in the automobile to how we feed our bodies," Huelsing continues. "Each of you has one vehicle, one body, in your lifetime in which to travel. You put food in for fuel. What you choose to eat and how you take care of your body will give you a better chance for good health and a better life." Huelsing also is chief executive officer of Living Well Village, a 250-acre campground that houses health camps and wellness programs, and director of its flagship program, Camp Jump Start, the only not-for-profit residential weight-loss camp for kids in North America. The 250-acre camp, a half-hour drive from Ladue, attracts campers from 50 states and 20 foreign countries. Summer 2015 saw 200 adolescents lose a total of 2,538 pounds.

While working as a registered nurse, Huelsing explains she saw children who were sick with diseases that normally affect adults. She had an idea. "Honey, give me all your money," she recalls telling her husband, Tom.

Founded in 2003, her solution was Camp Jump Start, which now holds a pair of four-week sessions each summer in a medically safe, supervised and supportive environment. Huelsing says the bottom line here is a mission "to help kids take control of their own health and happiness, and all children – with or without weight issues – should attend the camp." To tend to the camp's daily needs, Huelsing and Tom sold their home and now live in a small house on the camp's grounds.

Published nationally and internationally in medical journals, Huelsing has been honored as a St. Louis Woman of Achievement. She has appeared on national news and MTV, and PBS filmed a documentary at the camp last summer called *Weighed Down* that will air this spring.

Last summer, 49 campers arrived at camp with warning signs of Type 2 diabetes. Twenty-one campers had their symptoms reduced, and 28 had their warning signs completely eliminated by the end of camp. "Each was given a new lease on life," she says. "Blood pressure readings for all campers improved. Each summer we see reversals in disease."

A study by the National Institutes of Health and Centers for Disease Control reports that lifestyle is better at delaying the onset of diabetes than any medication. "Camp Jump Start is part of the solution," Huelsing says. "Our data shows that we put kids back on track to health. They learn it, live it and then do it at home."

Huelsing explains how she shows her campers two human hearts, one healthy and


the other one five times larger. "The big heart belonged to a 50-year-old man who had quadruple-bypass surgery," she explains to them. "He worked an 8-to-5 job daily, ate fast food for lunch, laid around on his sofa after work and, 10 years later, was surprised that something happened to his vessels. If you live healthfully, your insides will be healthy. It is all about choices. We teach our kids to pay attention to their weaknesses but to also play to their strengths; we teach them how to take control of their lives."

As a bonus, all campers voice more confidence and better self-esteem. Teegan, 15, calls the camp her "home away from home," adding, "It's a place of safety and self-protection. This is the first time I've felt this happy about myself, and it's not just because I lost weight – it's because this camp taught me self-worth." She says that she also enjoyed the outdoor activities, such as biking, hiking, swimming and field sports, and that camp is fun and not a boot camp.

In 2015, campers attending for eight weeks averaged weight loss of 31 pounds. Those in the four-week program lost an average of 17 pounds. Historically, kids lose 7 to 10 percent of their body weight in four weeks, which can be doubled in eight weeks, according to Huelsing. A total of 1,641 waist-inches disappeared.

"We give parents homework so that the environment is healthy when their child returns home," Huelsing says. "A dad called and said, 'Fix my kid.' Instead, we helped the entire family. So many families feel helpless and hopeless, and the children have no self-worth. After camp, kids return home with a healthy and positive attitude."

Huelsing says she does it by teaching people how to take control of their situations and giving them the tools they need to get to a better place. "One cannot believe everything written on the Internet or in grocery stores," she says. "When times get tough, we all need support and accurate information. Camp Jump Start helps campers make better choices. Weight is a lifelong struggle. Many times the environment [around] peer pressure can be so destructive. Camp teaches healthier lifestyle choices."

Camp Jump Start is not just nutrition and exercise, either. Huelsing feels strongly that adolescents need to disconnect from electronics and reconnect with people. "A good many kids don't know how to make or sustain a friendship," she says. "In our anti-bullying program, we listen and address the issues. We teach kids how not to be a victim with our self-defense classes. Anger management and anxiety are huge with our kids today, so we teach coping skills to make the kids feel comfortable in their own skin. There are programs at camp focusing on family issues, loss of a loved one and healthy relationships. When you take care of these causes, the symptom of weight becomes a nonissue." 

Camp Jump Start, 3602 Lions Den Road, Imperial, 636-287-5004, [campjumpstart.com](http://campjumpstart.com)





Tom and Jean Huelsing



## CAMP JUMP START

SESSION 1 | 4 WEEKS | \$4,295  
Sun., June 12, to Sat., July 9

SESSION 2 | 4 WEEKS | \$4,295  
Sun., July 10, to Sat., Aug. 6

SESSION 3 | 8 WEEKS | \$8,195  
Sun., June 12, to Sat., Aug. 6