



**SHE WAS READY FOR A FIGHT** to the death! Tristen Davis (above) hopped on the back of Bob Reuther Sunday during "Noodle Wars," the end-of-year party that the group Teens For Christ throws every year to welcome new seventh-graders to the fold.

# Teens for Christ work hard, play hard

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It was a war. Well, a noodle war, to be exact. Teens for Christ, the Christian group for active teens in Oberlin, had its end-of-year party on Sunday, with the kids battling it out with pool noodles and enjoying some sunshine. Pastor Doug Mason, who helps the kids learn through community service and train for missionary trips, said that 39 kids showed up, mostly sixth graders who will be old enough to join this fall.

The group has been around for 18 years, Mr. Mason said, eight of which he's been the leader. It isn't affiliated with any one church, he said, so the program runs every year on donations alone.

Which brings us to the teens' primary objective: missionary training.

"We do them every year," said Mr. Mason. "There's usually three teams that go out every summer. The one place we go at least every other year is Cary, Miss. — the poorest part of the Mississippi Delta area. There's three levels of trips: the Colorado trip is the beginner trip, where we have kids coming out of eighth grade, but also some older kids who are more experienced to

help the younger ones. It's about a week long, and usually focused on going to some Christian camp and helping around the camp to set up before the season starts. We do painting, cleaning grounds, stuff like that. It's like an 'intro to missions' sort of trip.

"The Cary team is usually the longest trip, at two weeks generally. This is where they're going to a place that works with (the Cari Christian Center), with people in poverty in that area. They have their own second-hand store, and we'll often help unload trucks, sort what comes in and help organize.

"If there's repair work, we'll help with that, but most of them work with the people who need help. It's very physical labor. We bring experienced handyman types with us and they'll put on new roofs, paint a house, put in bathrooms and porches. Most of them will spend the bulk of the time working on someone's home.

"It's really really hot and humid; it's really hard work. And it's a challenge to get through the day. But by the end of the trip, it's also a challenge to keep getting along with everybody, so we practice the 'It's not about me' philosophy, where we try to get the kids to focus on others

and not themselves. And then when we're on the work site, we have another theme called 'I'd be glad to,' where that's your response to everything. It really enforces the first idea."

Which brings us to the most advanced trip — to Jamaica.

"The Jamaica trip is for the advanced team," he said. "You have to be mission-trip experienced to be on the team, and you have to be what the TFC considers spiritually mature, because we can't send them home.... Plus, there's more risk. I mean, we're going to Jamaica, and we're not going to the tourist areas....

"We'll be getting into nursing homes and hospitals, and we'll do devotion programs in the schools, which is unusual. And then a large part of the trip is unknown, because it depends on what the need is when we get there.

"This advanced team is more focused on evangelism, but the idea is to spend the first part of the trip building relationships so that we have earned the right to be heard.

"And what we'll do most likely is put on a kind of program, where we'll be at one of the churches on Sunday morning, and it'll be anything from sitting there to doing

the whole service; we have no idea. I do know that when we go into the hospitals and nursing homes, it will be one on-one-ministry, where we're holding their hand, talking to people who can't get out of bed or are dying. It will be very emotionally challenging for us.

"We have all the comforts of life, and then we go down there to be with people who don't have those things... The ministry has a compound down there where we'll stay, and it's not air conditioned or anything. They've got water and electricity,

but that's it. I'm hoping there's a cool evening breeze at least.

"Our kids are asked to raise a minimum of \$1,300 for that trip, but I've been telling the kids to focus on \$1,500. The out-of-country trips are just always more expensive."

Mr. Mason said that the Jamaica team will leave May 27 and return June 5, so time is getting short to raise what they need.

"It's neat," he said of the trips. "The kids that go always want to go again. I've never come across one that didn't want to go again. One of

the things that a lot of people don't understand is that we don't allow the kids' immediate family to pay for the trip. They have to raise the funds.... It's up to them, and if the kid puts in the effort, generally it happens."

Mr. Mason said that the amounts the kids need to raise depend on which trip they're going on, but if you're interested in helping them out, you can always call Mr. Mason at (785) 475-4021. He said that any checks should be made out to TFC Connection.

Photos by Doug Mason



**IN ORDER TO FIGHT** a noodle war, one must first make noodle weaponry: Teens for Christ members Jillian Peters

and Megan Lohofener (left) duked it out with the other kids Sunday before getting crazy with shaving cream, which



Drew Juenemann (right) saw as a perfect opportunity for a wild hairdo.