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North Star Reach CEO Receives Prestigious Award from University of Michigan Council for Disability Concerns

James T. Neubacher Award recognizes commitment to removing barriers to full participation for people with disabilities

ANN ARBOR, Mich.— In recognition of his passion and vision for creating accessible, inclusive, and cost-free camp experiences for children with serious illnesses, North Star Reach founder and CEO **Doug Armstrong** has won the prestigious James T. Neubacher Award. Presented annually by the University of Michigan's Council for Disability Concerns, the award recognizes U-M faculty, staff, students or alumni who demonstrate a commitment to removing barriers to full participation for people with disabilities.

Located on 105 wooded acres in Pinckney, Mich., about 20 miles northwest of Ann Arbor, North Star Reach is the only camp of its kind serving children with serious health challenges and their families in the Great Lakes Region. Since the camp opened in 2016, it has already welcomed more than 2,000 children with serious illnesses and their families.

"I am tremendously honored to receive this award and help carry on the work of James Neubacher," Armstrong said. "We strive every day at North Star Reach to make the world a better place for children who face enormous challenges and deserve the opportunity to just feel like a normal kid. I'm so grateful to the University of Michigan's Council for Disability Concerns for this recognition, and my hope is that this helps more families learn about us, so we can provide more life-changing camp experiences."

In 2007, Armstrong, a nurse, walked away from a career as director of clinical research for the University of Michigan Health System's Transplant Center in order to pursue his dream of building a year-round, medically-sound camp to support the special needs of pediatric patients.

"A patient's father told me his son wanted to go to summer camp, but no camp would accept him because he needed medical support," he said. "I benefited greatly from camp as a kid, and I really felt that children cheated out of their childhood by illness needed this experience."

The medical specialty camp includes a state-of-the-art health center, dining hall, climate-controlled cabins to house campers and staff, a treehouse, arts and crafts center, two heated swimming pools, nature trails, an archery range, an amphitheater, and a waterfront dock, all designed to fit in a rustic camp environment and entirely accessible.

The traditional camp programs are also intentionally designed to accommodate a diverse range of abilities. Outdoor activities and community-building events aim to help kids who often spend significant time in hospitals and doctors' offices a chance to reclaim their childhood. Campers embark on learning new skills like archery, canoeing, fishing, and swimming, all in a fun, medically-sound environment.

Children living with chronic and life-threatening medical conditions like heart disease, blood disorders, and epilepsy may face the stigma often associated with their illness, which can make socializing with peers challenging. As a result, they often feel left out and develop low self-esteem and a diminished

sense of possibility. At North Star Reach, campers connect with other kids facing similar health challenges and feel a sense of normalcy and belonging, often for the first time in their lives.

“As a lifelong healthcare provider, I believe camp is a ‘healing bridge,’” says Armstrong. “Hospitals are amazing at providing cures. But our camp provides a vital place where kids with serious health challenges move from being a ‘sick kid’ to feeling a sense of normalcy. Thanks to an incredible community of donors, foundations, hospital partners, and volunteers, we’ve been fortunate to create a special healing place for deserving kids and their families.”

The award was created in honor of Neubacher, a U-M alumnus who lived with multiple sclerosis and was a columnist for the Detroit Free Press and an advocate for equal rights and opportunities for people with disabilities. In one of his most-well known columns, Neubacher encouraged others to increase awareness of disability-related issues with these eight words: “Raise a little consciousness. Raise a little hell!”

About North Star Reach

Located on 105 scenic acres of rolling hills and waterfront in Pickney, Michigan, North Star Reach is a medically-supported camp that serves kids with chronic and life-threatening health challenges and their family members, all at no charge to them. Our state-of-the-art health center is staffed by medical professionals from leading hospitals and medical centers throughout the Great Lakes region. North Star Reach is also a member of the prestigious SeriousFun Children’s Network (SFCN). Founded by legendary actor and philanthropist Paul Newman in 1988, SFCN is now a global network of 30 camps and programs for children with special medical needs. As a 501(c) 3 non-profit organization, North Star Reach is independently managed and funded and entirely dependent on private donations to serve every camper free of charge. Learn more at our [website](#), and on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), and [LinkedIn](#).