

# From College Settlement Camp Counselor to Longest-Serving Board Member, Mike Spangler Sees the Mission Clearly

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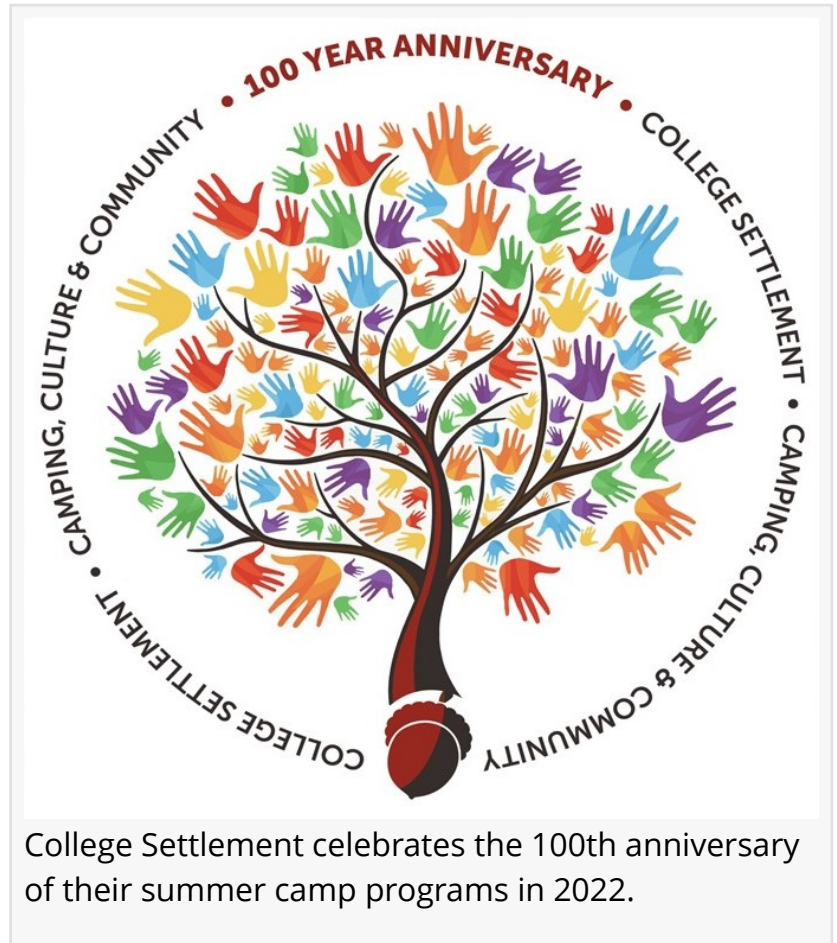
/EINPresswire.com/ -- Celebrating 100 years of serving the children of Philadelphia and their families by providing a healthy outdoor, country experience, the mission of [College Settlement Camps](#) is more vital than ever.

The summer of 2022 camp season began Monday, June 20th following a season of behind-the-scenes activity to guarantee a great summer. One of those behind-the-scenes players was Mike Spangler, who has been associated with College Settlement Camps since 1977.

Spangler has witnessed most of the history personally, growing from being an 18-year-old camp counselor to joining the corporation at age 23, and then the board at age 25. There's a through-line of his involvement with College Settlement that continues today in their 100th anniversary of the summer camps.

"I was a summer camp counselor for four summers from 1977 to 1980," said Spangler. "I was a cabin counselor for those first three summers, and then a nature craft specialist my fourth summer. I spent all of my childhood summers at a boy's camp where I learned about trees, conservation, fishing and animals, I brought that together with art and did projects with the kids."

Spangler had worked at a summer camp throughout his four years of high school that was very



College Settlement celebrates the 100th anniversary of their summer camp programs in 2022.

insular, and not diverse.

"There was a certain sameness that seemed to be encouraged and expected, and I was really kind of weary of that," Spangler said. "In my freshman year at Kutztown, somebody asked me what I was going to do that summer. I expressed my frustration with the idea of going back to that camp. He said I should check out College Settlement, and what he told me about it sounded fantastic.

"I fell in love with being a camp counselor at College Settlement. When I was working at the boys' camp that I'd grown up at, it wasn't something I particularly enjoyed. It was just rote, something I was doing because I'd done it every summer," explained Spangler. "When I arrived at College

Settlement I really fell in love with working with kids. It was wonderful that I got to this place where I met people of other races, other religions, other nationalities - it was all opened up to me. Everyone belonged, and everyone's uniqueness was celebrated. That just really spoke to me and helped me blossom, and then we're helping the kids to blossom. And I think a lot of the young adults who work there also blossom.

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...whether you're a child, or whether you're a counselor, or whether you're a parent of the kids, or a neighbor from the community, everyone's made to feel that they belong, that they're valued."

*Mike Spangler, College Settlement Camp Board Member*

little bunk of three kids."

After four summers as a camp counselor, Spangler had the desire to stay involved with College



Mike Spangler (center) and his Bunk 4 Bedford Lodge campers at College Settlement Camp in 1978.

"I remember one group, we usually had seven or eight kids in our bunkhouse, and somehow, I got lucky this one session, I only had three kids in my bunk," Spangler recalled. "It was because they were the youngest kids. I was like a "papa duck" that whole session, they followed me everywhere. I could take my whole bunk out in a rowboat, just the four of us would go out in a rowboat, we played cards, sang songs, read books, things that we couldn't do with a larger group. I had this whole session where it was just the four of us. I really remember with fondness that

Settlement after graduation from Kutztown.

"I would come to the camp once a session and I would design a t-shirt for the kids that session and sometimes I would lead an art activity or an arts and crafts activity. I started to become a fixture, one weekend a session for a good six or eight more summers," said Spangler. "After two or three summers, I was asked to join the corporation, which was the pool of volunteers that made up all the committees. That was in 1982. Then I joined the College Settlement board. I was pretty young to be on the board with a lot of older people."

Spangler has been a member of the College Settlement board for 37 years, the longest-serving member.

"I'm immensely proud of the work I've been a part of over the past several years. I'm in the middle of revitalizing the College Settlement Alumni Association," noted Spangler. "We've been working on promoting it beyond the original focus on former counselors and staff. We're now doing outreach to the families of current counselors and our current campers, finding out what adults in the families of those current campers are former campers themselves and connecting with them on social media. I just met somebody at one of our open houses who told me that she learned to swim at College Settlement, and she channeled that into her current career as the aquatic director at the YMCA of Greater Philadelphia in Conshohocken.

"We've dubbed this summer, 100 years of belonging. That really resonates because I was a kid who did not feel like he belonged, I was always trying to, I was trying to always be the same that everyone else was, a very insular upbringing, sameness was encouraged. Fitting in didn't mean that everything was accepted, it meant being like everyone else," Spangler said. "When I arrived at College Settlement, that just got blown apart. Everyone belongs, and everyone is different, and that is to be celebrated. I felt that on arrival, and I feel that to this day, that whether you're a child, or whether you're a counselor, or whether you're a parent of the kids, or a neighbor from the community, everyone's made to feel that they belong, that they're valued. That continues to resonate for me. I'm very gratified that I've been part of all the changes that have happened over these four decades.



Mike Spangler (left) receiving a "30 Years of Service Award" from former College Settlement Executive Director Rob Kutzik (right) at the 3rd Annual "Acorns to Oaks Gala" in 2015.

"I can see that we have remained relevant, and we've remained in touch," added Spangler. "I'm proud to have been part of, and also to witness our staying relevant and strong for these last 40 of the 100 years."

Jim DeLorenzo

Jim DeLorenzo Public Relations

+1 215-266-5943

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