

## TELEGRAM—Worcester, MA

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# Encounter at Joslin camp dance led to marriage proposal

By Ellie Oleson CORRESPONDENT

**OXFORD** ♦ One of the lessons taught at the Barton and Joslin camps for children with diabetes is that anything is possible. A couple who started as campers, returned as counselors and now are engaged drove that lesson home.

“This camp is everything to me,” said bride-to-be Kylee E. Driscoll, 25, special events coordinator at the camps.

Husband-to-be and camp cook Josh J. Walsh, 26, agreed. This is his 14th summer at the camps.

Oxford's Clara Barton Camp for girls, which has 93 campers this summer, and Charlton's Camp Joslin for boys, which has 74 campers, are owned and operated by The Barton Center for Diabetes Education Inc.

Both camps offer children with Type 1 diabetes from across the country and around the world the opportunity to enjoy an exciting summer camp experience, complete with sports, talent shows, hikes and a weekly dance, while learning to independently manage their diabetes.

The camps also offer campers, counselors and staff members the chance to live in a world in which diabetes is the norm rather than the exception.

“If you visit, don't be surprised if the kids offer to check your blood sugar,” said Lynn A. Butler, associate executive director.

Campers each pay \$1,135 per week, which includes all medication and supplies.

“The kids learn survival skills while having fun,” Ms. Butler said.

For many campers, the Joslin or Barton camp is their first experience away from home.

“Parents, especially parents of newly diagnosed kids, have never left their kids with anyone before. They are so impressed when the kids come home a week or two later carb-counting and handling their own testing and insulin. It can be life-changing,” Ms. Butler said.

Mr. Walsh's mother is also diabetic and came to the Barton Camp as a child. Josh was 18 months old when he was diagnosed. He first came to the Joslin camp when he was 10.



Josh Walsh and Kylee Driscoll of Southbridge, both employees of The Barton Center for Diabetes Education, met at a camp dance. This year, they will be married at Clara Barton Camp in Oxford. (T&G Staff/PAUL KAPTEYN)

“I was homesick the first two days, but that was it,” he said. He has come to the camp nearly every year since.

“I became mature younger than my friends. Camp shows you how to take care of yourself, to be independent.”

Mr. Walsh grew up in St. Albans, Vt., where he first began cooking.

“Our high school offered a culinary course, and I gave it a try. I've been cooking ever since,” he said.

He attended the Connecticut Culinary Institute and has been cooking and working in restaurants for 13 years. Although he is enjoying cooking at the camp, he is looking for a more permanent position.

Ms. Butler said she wants to keep her chef as long as possible.

“It's been great! We rarely have someone this knowledgeable and talented in our kitchen.”

Ms. Driscoll, who grew up in Manchester, Conn., was diagnosed with diabetes at age 7 and first heard about the Barton Camp in a support group. She first attended the camp at age 11 in 1997.

“I was a big baby and was very homesick. I felt very comfortable with diabetes, but I missed my parents,” she said.

She returned the next year, and at age 17 became a counselor-in-training, and then a counselor. She spent a year in Boston working with the Americorps' City Year program, and then was named Barton Camp unit director. Later, she became program coordinator. Since March, she has been special events coordinator.

She first met Mr. Walsh, who was waterfront director at Camp Joslin in 2008, when they were chaperones at a Tuesday night campers' dance.

“I wasn't too sure of him at first. We butted heads. We were playing a counselors' scavenger hunt and had to play cards during the dance that Josh had organized. He wasn't happy we weren't watching the kids,” Ms. Driscoll said.

“My first impression of Kylee was that I didn't want my dance messed up,” Mr. Walsh said.

His second impression was much better, when the couple met again that October in Salt Lake City, Utah, where they were attending a Diabetes Education & Camping Association meeting.

Ms. Driscoll said, “We hit it off right away, talking about ways to improve camp. He had a girlfriend at the time, so we didn't start dating until that December. We've been together ever since.”

On Nov. 29, Mr. Walsh surprised Ms. Driscoll with an unusual marriage proposal. A florist in South Windsor, Conn., often puts a sign outside the shop offering a free rose to anyone with a certain name.

“We knew there would never be a Kylee, since my name is so unusual, but I said if it's ever Josh, we'll have to stop and get the rose,” Ms. Driscoll said.

Mr. Walsh arranged for the florist to put out “Josh,” and when Kylee said to stop, she was surprised with a dozen red roses and a proposal.

“I had always said he didn't have to give me an expensive ring. He gave me a candy ring pop, then he pulled a real ring from his pocket. It's beautiful. I feel very lucky,” she said.

Mr. Walsh insists that he is the lucky one.

They both said they are fortunate to have found each other at camp.

Ms. Driscoll said, “Since we both are diabetic, we get it. If one of us is having a bad day, the other one gets it. It's great. This camp has changed my whole life.”