

On quest to empower girls

THERE IS A SIMPLE REASON why the 70-year-old Girls' Vacation Fund changed its name to Girls Quest.

"Girls' Vacation Fund doesn't really tell what we're doing," said Girls Quest Executive Director Susan Hall. "We're taking these girls on a journey, a journey that will have a positive impact on their lives socially and academically."

"We'll always be the Girls' Vacation Fund, because that is what we were founded as. But we've rebranded our name and our programs."

In other words, like some other 70-year-olds, the Girls' Vacation Fund is getting a face-lift, tummy tuck and new hairdo.

Founded to expose inner city girls to summer camp experiences, Girls Quest has a new motto — "Going Outside, Growing Inside" — and changes on several fronts, including:

- Expanding its mentoring program to provide six to eight hours a month of face-to-face contact between girls and their mentors.
- Moving from cramped offices in midtown to more than 2,600 feet of space on W. 30th St.
- Beginning the second year of its Summer Experiential Education and Development Program, a host of educational and recreational activities held at Camp Oh-Neh-Tah, the group's 464-acre facility in East Windham in the Catskills. "We actually own a mountain," Hall laughed. "It's incredible."
- Hiring a fulltime camp director.
- Exploring ways to provide scholarships and travel abroad experiences for its teen counselors who continue on to college.
- Hiring Hall, who will celebrate a year with the group next month.

"We're expanding our programming, and moving our offices will let us do more workshops with the girls, to bring them into the office," Hall said. "We can take what they do in the summer and make sure they stay on track. That way we can be a year-round resource for them and have a deeper impact."

Girls Quest is now seeking applications for campers. Three hundred girls, ages 8 to 17, will attend the three

two-week sessions at Camp Oh-Neh-Tah this year.

Camp programs are geared toward empowering young women, Hall said. Though the caretaker and some of his crew are male, most camp activities are planned and run by women.

"It's important for women to start better identifying and respecting women," Hall said. "It's important that young girls see young women like themselves who are going to college, who show them there is more to life, more opportunities and choices out there for them."

Girls Quest draws campers from the five boroughs, Westchester County and

Long Island. Up to 70% of them are from single-parent homes, Hall said. Many have never been beyond a 60-block radius of their homes.

"The camp affords them an opportunity to go out in the mountains, in the fresh air, and just relax while learning," Hall said.

Hall, who holds a master's degree in public administration from New York University, has worked for such philanthropic organizations as the Commonwealth Fund and other nonprofits, including Planned Parenthood Federation of America.

"I always wanted a job where I could give back," Hall said.

Camp sessions run from July 1 through Aug. 14. There is a \$40 nonrefundable application fee, with tuition costing from \$110 to \$500, depending on ability to pay.

For an application, call (212) 532-7050, or check the Web site, www.girlsquest.org. crichardson@nydailynews.com

BENEFIT NIGHT

Girls Quest (formerly Girls' Vacation Fund) will hold its 70th annual Benefit on Friday from 6:30 p.m. to 10 p.m. at 370 Park Ave.

The evening includes drinks, hors d'oeuvres, buffet dinner and a night of casino games and raffles. Bids in the silent auction are already being taken on the auction page of the group's Web site, www.girlsquest.org.



Quest's Susan Hall holds photo of happy campers.

BY CLEM RICHARDSON