

2017 SPIRIT OF COCA-I NOMINEE

Rich Brundige

Executive Director, Camp Kids Are Kids Chicago



When thinking about the mission of COCA-I (To strengthen the international community of camps for children with cancer and their families through networking, education, and advocacy), and thinking about the spirit behind that mission, Rich Brundige immediately comes to mind.

Rich has spent decades volunteering at multiple camps for kids with cancer around the US, and more recently has also taken on a staff role as Camp Director and Executive Director at Camp Kids Are Kids Chicago (CKAKC). Even after taking on this paid staff position Rich has continued to volunteer at Camp Ta-Kum-Ta, Camp Can Do, Camp No Worries, Camp CAMP, and any others he can squeeze into his busy schedule.

That is the Spirit of COCA-I.

Rich also has spent countless hours volunteering directly for COCA-I, as a Board Member, as a member of various committees, as a COCA-I-Nut crafter, a scavenger-hunt-planner, and just about any other role you can imagine. In addition to all of that, unlike many who step back from volunteering their time to COCA-I once their term as a Board Member ends, Rich has continued to be involved and engaged regardless of any office he holds or any recognition he receives.

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Rich has trained scores of staff, volunteers, and Leaders in Training (LIT) over the years, in fact developing a curriculum for LIT Training that has been shared and replicated at other camps. He has volunteered to lead team building and other training sessions at camps from the Northeast to the Deep South and points beyond. He has been a frequent presenter at COCA-I conferences, further sharing his knowledge and experiences to help strengthen the international community of camps for children with cancer and their families. In fact, Rich has always been willing to selflessly share his expertise (and any materials he has developed) with any who ask for it without hesitation, without seeking recognition, and without any sense of ownership.

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Let's talk about COCA-I-Nuts. Rich began using his creative talents to bring a little fun to COCA-I's annual silent auction by creating collectible "COCA-I-Nuts" sometime back in the early 2000's, and he has continued to voluntarily create these themed additions for nearly two decades. He spends hours every year researching local trivia and celebrities, collecting the materials to get the caricatures "just right," assembling them, and then delivering them to conference where they add a memorable spark of fun, excitement, and quirkiness to the COCA-I Silent Auction. In many respects, Rich is able to bring a bit of the fun of camp to the conference in this way each year. Of course, he also infuses the fun of camp into conference by leading songs, games, team builders, and crazy aerobics every chance he gets.

That is the Spirit of COCA-I.

Of course, for Rich, leading, planning, and participating in camps around the US and contributing significantly to COCA-I's Annual Conference are not nearly enough. He also has helped plan and execute a number of successful Regional Mini-COCA-I conferences, and flown coast-to-coast to participate in others. His passion for COCA-I, for children's oncology camps, and for all who part of the COCA-I family is evident and contagious.

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