

## LIFESTYLE / FAMILY

# Usdan Summer Camp for the Arts marks its 50th anniversary

Campers now can choose from more than 100 classes.



James Sample conducts Orchestra IV in 1970 at Usdan Summer Camp for the Arts, which is celebrating its 50th anniversary. Sample was the principal conductor in the camp's early years.

**By Beth Whitehouse**

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*Updated August 2, 2018 8:36 AM*

When Usdan Summer Camp for the Arts in Wheatley Heights was founded in 1968, it was a pretty radical idea — a creative arts education summer camp with music, art and dance at its core.

“There was nothing like that in this area,” says current Executive Director Lauren Brandt Schloss. “[The founders] had this fantasy idea of what children needed, at least a certain kind of children, and 50 years later, that has been proven true.”

As Usdan celebrates its 50th anniversary, that idea has flourished for the 1,600 campers each summer who now can choose from more than 100 arts options, including stage combat, 3D design, organic gardening, Quidditch, cosplay and more. This summer marked the first-ever class for the Choreographers Institute, in which young dancemakers were invited to work with top contemporary choreographers. The camp now has more than 70 studios and theaters on its 140-acre campus. More than 40,000 campers have attended since 1968; famous alumni include Mariah Carey, Natalie

## Portman and Taylor Dayne.

On July 19, Usdan held a 50th Anniversary Gala at the camp; during the 300-person sit-down dinner, more than 50 people were acknowledged for their long-term commitment to Usdan, Schloss says. Many of them have been supporters since the camp's founding. In the mid-1960s, Maurice Hexter, then executive vice president of the Federation of Jewish Philanthropies, and Andrew McKinley, a musician and member of Juilliard's faculty, enlisted philanthropist Samuel Lemberg to fund the camp, which Lemberg named after his daughter, Suzanne Usdan.

One of those honored is Elaine Panik Gates, 90, of Centerport, who was the director of the children's chorus for decades. "It's a super, super camp," she says. "It gives the kids on Long Island the chance to do what they really love."