Ms. Independent
Marie Blanchard

When the van door opens, Marie steps out onto the fresh mountain dirt and is immediately greeted by many old friends and friendly new faces. She is smiling from ear to ear and giggles with great excitement. This is Marie’s 13th year at Mt. Hood Kiwanis and she feels right at home. The fresh air and cool breeze soothes her as she says good-bye to her mom and heads to check in. Marie has one week to do all of the things she loves: horseback riding, spending time in the pool, and hiking. She knows there will be things that push her out of her comfort zone at camp and she loves the challenge because it makes her more independent! When Marie first started going to Kiwanis Camp at age 9 in 2000, it was the first time she had been away from home. Each year it became easier for Marie to leave her immediate family because she knew she was joining her camp family.

“I come back to camp every year because I love it! Plus, everyone knows me.”
Over the years Marie has had many accomplishments at camp including climbing to the top of the 30 foot rock wall, canoeing on Trillium Lake, and this year she hiked 2 miles to the waterfall without her wheelchair. She is always the first to volunteer and shows the rookies how to do activities like the Flying Squirrel. One of Marie’s greatest memories was when her mother came to camp during a Thursday’s BBQ.

The independence Marie honed at Mt. Hood Kiwanis Camp has helped her in her daily life in Portland, Oregon. She travels on public transportation by herself and knows her way around the Portland area. Marie takes an online math class through Portland Community College and meets with her instructor at PCC once a week. She works part-time at Multnomah Arts Center as a data entry helper.
She loves to travel and even traveled independently across the country at age 16 to visit her favorite aunt. She also flew alone at age 21 to see her best friend and movement teacher. She has flown alone to Boston twice, and New York and San Diego once. She attributes the courage she has for traveling across the country on her own from her experience at camp.

Mt. Hood Kiwanis Camp is a place where Marie returns every year because she loves the staff, challenges, and independence. Marie’s goal every year is to build friendships with other peers. She wants others to have the same great experience as she has had. Back in 2007, Marie raised $500 by auctioning off a cook book she wrote. The proceeds went toward a fund to build a new pool at camp that can accommodate more people.

Marie currently sells artwork online that are inspired by her time at camp and her love for the arts. She has sold 61 items including a variety of ceramic pieces and paintings. Marie’s artwork can be found at: www.etsy.com/shop/butterflyheart44