

January 2014

## Gary's Camping Newsletter

### *Continuous Improvement for Great Camp Leaders*

*(view as a printable PDF)*

"It's never too late to have a happy childhood."

— Tom Robbins, *'Still Life with Woodpecker'*

**The Buddy Bench** – Peter McGregor writes: "I love your newsletter every month; it's always a delight to read. I'm no longer a camp professional but I do like to keep up to speed on what's happening in the industry. I came across this article on the Huffington Post - could be a great (and super-simple and oh-so-obvious) idea for camps - The 'Buddy Bench' - a designated area where kids can go to hang out and make friends on their own terms." [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/12/03/second-grader-buddy-bench\\_n\\_4378248.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/12/03/second-grader-buddy-bench_n_4378248.html) -- [peter.a.mcgregor@gmail.com](mailto:peter.a.mcgregor@gmail.com)

**Webpage of the Month** – Photos are worth a thousand words? That was when words had more value. Now photos that tell stories are *priceless*. Here are two excellent examples of how simple it is to stand out from all of the other camps by simply showing *what camp looks like*:

Activities: <http://rochesterymca.org/camps/overnight-camps/camp-gorham/activities>

Facilities: <http://rochesterymca.org/camps/overnight-camps/camp-gorham/facilities>



**Reading Role Models** – Some things I just have to see to believe. Most of us have known a few great counselors who read to their campers every day during "Siesta." But at YMCA Camp Abe Lincoln (IA) they make it easy for *every* camper to pick out books to read from a big library, and an *expectation* that staff read aloud to those kids that don't feel like reading on their own. And once they all saw how great it was... it was self-sustaining! (And a donor is creating an even better library!) *For more, contact Zack at [zklipsch@scottcountyfamilyy.org](mailto:zklipsch@scottcountyfamilyy.org).*

**PhD (Post Hole Digger)** – I love this idea! "Sometimes you've got to dig a hole that's deeper than the range of a basic post-hole digger. An easier approach is to dig with a shop vac. Loosen the dirt with the lightest tool possible, such as a piece of electrical conduit with a flattened end. Now put a 2-in.-dia. PVC-pipe extension on the nozzle of the vacuum, and suck the dirt out of the hole. In the right soil conditions,

you'll be amazed by how well this works." (From a great daily blog you can sign up for: <http://www.finehomebuilding.com/how-to/tips/digging-deep-holes.aspx>)

**Your Future is Local** – Quick... who are the members of your camp's active "Alumni?" They're almost all former counselors. That's because the very best character development, life-skill growth, and sense of community has always happened in our *camp counselors*. This is nothing to be ashamed of... it's the greatest legacy of camping. Historically, most youth camps were built to serve a specific community or region. The money to build the camp came from there, the campers came from there, and the counselors came from there. That's why camp boards of directors are usually stacked with former counselors from the same region.

Here's a very common boast from a current camp website: "Our counselors come from 27 states and 9 foreign countries!" Between the internet and international placement agencies, sourcing staff from anywhere but local has become commonplace. Tell me, how many of these will be on your camp's board in the future? And don't your donors hope their gifts will go to benefit their own community? Not just for campers... but for the great creators, leaders, and parents that will come out of the staff. Yes, hire a few international staff from truly diverse cultures. But otherwise, please, hire local this summer.

**"But What Would I Do?"** – Some of the very best experiences at camp happen during "cabin time" where counselors just do stuff with their kids. But I often hear camp leaders say "We tried putting that on the schedule, but lots of the counselors didn't know what to do." So give them *lots* of ideas. Begin now (so staff can be ready by summer). Here's a simple list to start you off (great if you're a parent, too!): <http://www.pinterest.com/pin/260505159670056201/>

**Trade Work for an RV Site** – There are lots of senior adults who are on the lookout for a way to serve and a nice place to park their deluxe RV. "Workamper" is a very successful program for matchmaking these folks and the jobs they'd like to fill. Theme parks and campgrounds are way ahead of youth camping in this area, but a number of camps have added several nice RV hookup sites and trade them for work in maintenance, administration, foodservice, and program: <http://www.hireaworkamper.com/>

**She Has a Way With Words** – As an industry, we do a really lousy job of describing the benefits of our product. I keep pushing that photos are the easiest way to get it right, but then along comes a really great example of written words that paint an emotional picture of what parents are looking for. Jennifer "JD" Deasy, assistant director of YMCA Camp Coniston, wrote this for their recent year-end newsletter:

"WE ALL LOVE CAMP for its energy and for the many people who make us feel important. The face-to-face relationships we create each summer are more valuable than words. We care, we console — and we communicate. Because of this atmosphere of sharing and talking, we gain life skills that will help our futures. We'll volunteer, we'll be great parents, we'll be desirable employees and fantastic supervisors who understand people ... we'll know how to work with others to reach common goals, and we'll know how to motivate ourselves and those around us. Camp is intentional: intentional fun, intentional togetherness, intentional problem solving, intentional confidence building, and intentional group achievements. We're intentional about developing life skills.

"WHAT DO YOU FIND AT CONISTON? Authentic care and concern for people. You also find genuine challenges that help us grow and become more confident. These lessons let us discover

exactly who we are ... and who we want to become. The combination of a "listening ear," and conversations with a different point of view, helps us to understand the word differently and grow. But what do we do together to create these life skills? Coniston's planned activities and group work gives us stories that last forever ... and within those stories is how character is built.  
-JD"

(Amazingly, I said the same thing about her year-end report LAST year. Worth looking at again: <http://www.garyforster.com/documents/2013-2-February-Newsletter.pdf> )-- contact JD at [jen@coniston.org](mailto:jen@coniston.org)

**SEE GARY LIVE** at several more regional camp conferences, including:

**Annual Camp Maintenance Conference – March 25 - 27** on beautiful Lake George NY [http://www.cdymca.org/Libraries/Chingachgook\\_Documents/2014\\_Conference\\_Flyer.sflb.ashx](http://www.cdymca.org/Libraries/Chingachgook_Documents/2014_Conference_Flyer.sflb.ashx) (camp maintenance staff and execs come from all over the country).

**ACA New England -- March 28-29, Manchester NH** <http://www.acanewengland.org/education-training/conference> -- *100 Great Ideas - Every One Stolen; Your Camping Future: Who's Driving; The Eight Hallmarks of Great Camps, and How to Eat an Elephant (one bite at a time!)*. I'm looking for lunch and dinner companions, too!

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*"A goal is a dream with a deadline." -- Napoleon Hill*

*"An error is not a mistake until you refuse to correct it." – Grenville Kleiser*

*"Don't sweat the petty things and don't pet the sweaty things." -- George Carlin*

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Best wishes for your best year ever,

*Gary*

Gary Forster, LLC

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