

June 2012

Gary's Camping Newsletter

Continuous Improvement for Great Camp Leaders

"The best way to boost confidence in the girl with low self-esteem at the dance... is to ask her to dance." -- Jim Taylor

Please allow me to Brag – On June 18th our son Kevin was one of 3 guides leading 10 climbers to summit the highest peak in North America, Denali in Alaska (where the *high* temperature was 0 degrees F at 20,320 ft!) Our son Eric is the board chairman for the Southeast Alaska State Fair this year, where they're celebrating the end of the Mayan calendar with a "Fair Like There's No Tomorrow."

<http://www.seakfair.org/> (with cool artwork drawn by Kevin).

Save Cash on Crafts – And who doesn't want more cash? (*Except that Capital One baby...*) A terrific tip from Camp Echo, MI: "While placing a large A&C order for the summer I did a Google search for coupon codes for S&S Crafts. I hit the jackpot at www.retailmenot.com. I found one that took 30% off my order *and* threw in free shipping. I ended up saving over \$400. I know a lot of people probably know this trick, but those who don't should saving money." -- Meredith Stevens MeredithS@mcgawymca.org

Parents Go Gaga – Doug Berkel writes, "Our day camps in Kansas City have just caught the Gaga (or 'Israeli Dodgeball') fever and I don't see it going away anytime soon. The only prescription has been more Gaga Ball. The problem we run into is that our programs run out of elementary schools and they tend to be pretty picky when it comes to building large arenas on their property. We figured out a great way to create portable 'pits' using the school's gym mats (stood on end, connected with their Velcro tabs). Kids love it, Staff love it, and even Parents love it!



Parents are even staying to play!" -- dougberkel@kansascityymca.org -- (*Editor's note: now THERE's a great idea, INVITE parents to stay for Gaga/4-Square/Kickball! Michael Brandewien says every town in America should have a parent/child kickball league! – Gary*)

Gaga Where? – I've visited lots of camps who have added a Gaga pit (see designs at <http://www.garyforster.com/library.php>) but it's often way off by itself. In order for campers to use them it has to be a scheduled, destination activity. At most they might get to play it once or twice. That's a missed opportunity. Put YOUR Gaga pits (and checkers and 4-square and Carpetball) right where your campers gather before meals and before activities. They'll be kid-magnets (and boredom-busters).

“Where Was That Amazing Whiffle Ball Stadium?” – I get that question a lot. Here’s the amazing video on Camp Jewell’s Whiffle Ball Stadium <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YPt8AzcjB1I>, and the original Camp Business article <http://www.northstarpubs.com/articles/cb/a-wiffle-effect>.

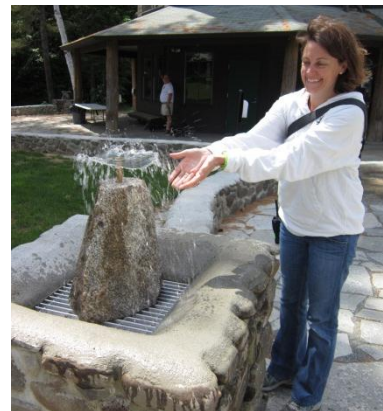
Every Lifeguard Must Read These – Half of the camps I visit don’t understand the reason for their own waterfront procedures, and that makes them very dangerous places to swim. Insist your lifeguards read these two articles (you should, too): <http://garyforster.com/documents/BuddyUp-GaryForster.pdf> by me, and <http://www.northstarpubs.com/articles/cb/doubt-it-or-drill-it> by Dr Chris Thurber.

A Beautiful Thing – I was at YMCA Camp Lake Wenatchee for a couple of days (it’s in the Cascade Mountains, need I say more?) When they have “camper’s choice” activities, counselors each stand up and give a short commercial on what their activity/craft project/sport will be. Eric “Maverick” Krueger (all the counselors have camp names) announced he was doing “Cloud Watching” again down at the beach. Kids RACED to get to him first so they could be included. It seems he has them all lay on the beach with their heads together in a circle, and they find clouds that look like different things. So your board members think there’s a videogame-driven apocalypse coming? Not if we have anything to do with it!

And why not record your own Camp Songs? Burn cheap CDs so parents can hear them in the car on the way home; post them on your web site for free download so kids can listen to them on their MP3 players! (You’ve got *campers* who already know how to do all of this... just ask.)

Wagons Ho! – Woodhaven Day Camp (MA) provides each group with a red wagon to pull their water-bottles around from activity to activity. Everybody drinks more because they’re so visible, and the counselors make sure everybody re-loads when they get empty. Another cool idea: a big Rubbermaid bin for *each* daycamp group where they start and finish the day. It acts as the counselor’s mailbox supply bin, and a dry place to keep craft projects and notes going home at the end of the day. – *contact paula@campwoodhaven.com*

Tale of Two Hands – Most camps still aren’t taking the Norovirus threat seriously. And several *dozen* camps will again close for a session or more this summer as a result. (Projectile vomiting. Got your attention now?) All because we don’t have kids wash or sterilize their hands before they eat. One camp put up a token Pural dispenser (now hidden behind the coat rack). Camp



Coniston NH installed 8 outdoor handwashing stations that look like fountains. Their kids are much less likely to get sick this summer. Please read the simple CDC factsheet on Norovirus: <http://www.cdc.gov/Norovirus/> And at least have kids Pural before every meal.

Closing Slideshow Music – A final night slide show of the past session of camp has become a ritual at many camps. Some still burn it to CDs for parents to buy, but it’s more popular (and more beneficial for

marketing) to post it on YouTube on your website and Facebook. Kids and moms can show all of their friends and relatives. But too many of them have music that's too "harsh" for most adults and don't include enough photos that actually tell the story of what happened at camp. #1, show your photographers the kinds of photos you want (lots of close-ups of kids and staff *doing* things, not just hugging and looking at the camera). And #2, pick music that helps tell the story in both melody and lyrics (which means you have to be able to understand the words). These may be old, but they illustrate the potential:

- My all-time favorite, "[You Get What You Give](#)" by the Free Radicals (from the "Surf's Up" soundtrack).
- "I'll Remember (Theme from With Honors)" by Madonna (from the "With Honors" soundtrack).
- "These Are Days" by 10,000 Maniacs.
- "Good Riddance (Time Of Your Life)" –(the fork stuck in the road song) by Green Day.
- Most of these, and other good options, are on the new "GLEE - the Graduation Album."

Sundays Will Never Be the Same – (A "Best Of" story from past newsletters)... "Over the years we noticed that an increasing amount of our campers were struggling with the swim test on Sundays, our check-in day," wrote Karla Schell, Program Director of Mystic Lake Camp, MI. "When we really began to examine the cause we realized that on check-in day we were asking our campers to come to a brand new place, meet a bunch of strangers, then get into a swim suit to take a test in front of everyone else. Those first 24 hours are so critical to the relationships that campers develop with each other, staff, and camp that we needed to make a change. Check-in day needed to be cabin centered, taking a group of campers and really forming them into a team.

"This was a big change from what we had been doing for years, so naturally our returning staff were the most resistant. I enlisted 2 of the most dissatisfied staff to develop the schedule. They came back with exactly what we were looking for. Swim tests and some of the more detailed rules were moved to Monday morning. Also, choosing activity sessions was moved to Monday as well. Sunday became all about cabin time. As it stands now, from the time campers check in until Monday afternoon everything they do is with their cabins. This includes creating team flags, cheers, and chants with their team colors, playing icebreakers, taking tours of camp and getting to know the people that are going to be most important to them.

"We saw a tremendous change in our campers and staff with this new schedule. We had many campers test into higher swim levels because they were not as nervous and the rotation gave each cabin their own time at the waterfront rather than having several groups there. Campers signed up for activity sessions with their new friends and chose activities that they may not have chosen otherwise. Kids remembered rules better because they had just gone through them and they were with a small group where they felt more comfortable asking questions.

"Our staff were able to get to know campers better because the focus of the entire first day was on their kids. Many times our lifeguards would not even meet their cabin until dinner on Sunday because they were busy at the waterfront; this was not an issue any longer. Even small things like scheduling and staffing activity sessions was less burdensome because we had more time. Essentially, we became more "intentional" as Michael Brandwein likes to say, in order to foster friendships." -- *contact exec Ricky Wright at rwright@ymcaoflansing.org*

The BIG Game – Jeff Merhige of Camp Kern (OH) was asked by LucasFilm in 2008 to create summer camp activities based on their popular “Clone Wars” animated series. Combining Jeff’s understanding of what makes a successful camp event, and the artists at LucasFilm who provided supporting graphics and voice characters, it’s been a hit ever since. (Free, updated materials at www.clonewarscamp.com). As a result of this notoriety (Jeff and his family joined George Lucas for the ribbon-cutting of the updated Star Tours ride at Disney Orlando), he’s been asked to create more camp resources based on popular adventures:

- From Steven Spielberg, the series “**Falling Skies**” is starting its second season. Thanks to TNT and YMCA Camp Kern, your campers can resist an evil alien force and save the human race: <https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/viewform?fromEmail=true&formkey=dE1aaEpvM116Snpaa0Z6MExRQ2JqOVE6MQ>
- Working with youth book author John Flanagan and Penguin Publishing, Jeff has brought the **Rangers Apprentice** and **Brotherband** book series to life in a collection of games and themed camp activities at www.rangersapprentice.com/camps/
- See many of Camp Kern’s past literary themed games on YouTube. Their “[Percy Jackson and the Olympians](#)” days are legendary. -- JMerhige@daytonymca.org

“I hope you never lose your sense of wonder,
You get your fill to eat but always keep that hunger;
I hope you still feel small when you stand beside the ocean:
Whenever one door closes I hope one more opens,
Promise me that you’ll give faith a fighting chance;
And when you get the choice to sit it out or dance...

I hope you dance.” -- *Tia Sillers (sung by Lee Ann Womack)*

Best wishes,

Gary

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