

THE WOOD PILE

ACA MICHIGAN – SPRING 2010 NEWSLETTER



Letter from the President

Dear Fellow Camp Professionals,

Greetings from the “thawing” land of Southeastern Michigan! I realize that the thaw has not reached many of you yet, but the calendar says that we will be chipping the ice away in the very near future! And quickly just around the corner comes the craziness of another busy, demanding, exhausting, exciting, enthralling summer season. Let’s face it...my pulse starts jumping a little bit as I envision the first campers stepping onto our property and into our lives. Maybe you have a lot to do before that day arrives. I know that I do. But I wanted to briefly point our thoughts in that direction for a moment to begin thinking about the lives that will be changed this summer at facilities across the state, young lives and some a little older. Maybe even our own lives, if we allow that to happen.

My history with the American Camp Association began many years ago. I mainly wanted access to the best practices in the camp field hoping that one day my camp could be accredited. As I attended the ACA National Conference in Denver last month I began to realize all the many benefits that I have received from my association with this fine organization. I also realized how ACA is morphing even today to better represent us on the various national stages that define the youth development field and how they are preparing our local camps to function in that field.

I know that many of you have heard the news that ACA opened executive office space in Washington, D.C. back in January. Peg Smith and a few other national staff members are spending a couple of weeks each month in the nation’s capital because this is the location where decisions are made and partnerships are forged! I applaud this strategic move and look forward to benefiting from our presence there.

Another exciting practical application that ACA has provided for my local camp is the research tools that were formed over the last few years with a grant from the Lily Foundation. There are tools on the ACA website that are available to download and use with very minimal cost that allow our local organizations to start quantifying our summer camp experiences. All of you who approach larger donors and foundations have heard them ask for statistical evidence showing the impact of our programs on our clientele. For years we have told great stories (and we have some great stories, don’t we?) of our successes and that has been enough. Those days are becoming a reality of yesterday. The new expectation is that we back up our stories with data. This is being accomplished all across the country at camps just like yours and mine! Check out the research page on the website.

Make sure that you don’t overlook all the benefits that are coming from your association with ACA. And if you need something a little closer to home, we have a great team here in Michigan that would love to assist you in any way possible! Just call the ACA Michigan office.

Thanks for all you do!

David Long, Jr.
ACA, Michigan President



Never Enough INCOME to match the OUTGO?

Dennis VanKempen, Camp Henry



Marketing Your camp on a shoestring budget:

Deciding how to market your camp is always a challenge. Factor in a bad economy, budget challenges and the age of social media and the challenge can seem overwhelming. So many choices, with few resources. Here are 5 things your camp may be able to do or at least consider that will help get the word out about your camp and the incredible work you do!

Rethink big expensive brochures: Many camps have reduced the number of full brochures they print ; instead they send postcards that point the audience to your website or camp office. I have spoken with several camps that have gone to this process in recent years and all of them have reported steady or increased enrollment reaching more homes with a lower cost alternative. Some may argue that lower income homes do not have computers and thus cannot go to your website. Yet these camps report no drop in lower income campers. Consider this everyone has a cell phone and almost everyone has the internet on it.

Want to really rethink this. A few camps in Michigan have gone completely paperless in terms of brochures and handle everything on-line. They hand out simple ½ sheet info cards pointing folks to the website.

House party: Ask current camper families to host camp parties in their homes. Ask them to invite friends who have never been to your camp. You show up, bring pizza, your camp DVD and your energy. Ask the host parents and kids to share why your camp is great. Offer the host family a discount for hosting a party and a bigger discount if you register new campers from the party.

FACE the MEDIA Fearlessly: *Facebook, MySpace, Twitter, blogs...* Like it or not ,this is now how we communicate. The fastest growing demographic using Facebook is women from 25-45. Those are also the ages of our camper moms! Why not post information about your camp, field questions related to camp on these sites? Most of these alternatives are free . Take advantage of the way people are communicating!

TV, Radio, Newspapers.....Yes these may not be the wave of the future but they are still effective ways to communicate. These ads can be expensive but think out of the box. Want a radio remote at your open house but can't afford it? Barter with the radio station. Perhaps offer the DJ a free week of camp for his child in exchange for a live remote. It never hurts to ask!

Gain free media attention. Pay attention to the news and consider how what you're doing can become a relevant story. For example, one Michigan camp last year had record high summer enrollment. This would not have been a media story except for the fact that the economy was down and everyone was expecting camps to suffer. This camp gained a lot of positive media exposure by recognizing the story and then pitching it. Press releases are easy and free. You can find sample templates on Google. It costs nothing to send them. Note: Weekly local newspapers love this sort of thing.

Most Important: Camps are famous for doing great life -changing work and then hiding the story and impact. So when someone asks us about our camp we say what everyone says, "We have great staff, great program, great facilities, we love kids...." What makes **your** camp special and unique? Share your mission and vision and share some of the true stories of life impact you have had. Nothing sells like a touching, true story. The old song says, "Go tell it on the mountain..." (Just get the photographers up there to capture the moment for the media.)

Social Media and Camp: Tackling the Tough Questions

Matt Lechel, Girl Scouts Heart of Michigan

In the last year I've actively been listening to the various conversations we've been having about social networking and how 'best' to utilize these new technologies to serve our camps. I've listened to various 'experts' present on these tools, which almost always results in them explaining HOW to use the tools, not WHY we should use these tools, and or even HOW BEST to use these tools. I've often left discussions about social media being somewhat disappointed we weren't able to get past the basic fundamentals of the technologies and instead talk about more strategic issues.

I've noticed a few core questions I think are worth answering as we begin to peel the onion layers back on the mystique of social media, and the goal of my article is to begin to address these core questions. The questions are:

- What policies should govern my organizations usage of social media?
- Who should represent my organization online?
- How much time should we invest in each of these new technologies?
- How should that time be invested to be most productive?
- How do we not deter one of the greatest values of the camping movement (connection to the out of doors and the natural world) while trying to increasingly have a greater virtual presence?



Governance and Representation in Social Media

There are many examples available of social media policies that have already been developed that your organization can use to help develop its' own policy. One in particular that I think is a good example was developed by the Girl Scouts of San Gorgonio and can be found online at: https://ocn.girlscouts.org/SupportingDocuments/GSSGC_Social_Media_Policy.pdf.

Their policy is very simple:

1. Tell the truth.
2. Have a purpose.
3. Add value.
4. Be authentic.
5. Speak for yourself.
6. Play nice.
7. Respect copyright and fair use.
8. If it's confidential, keep it that way.
9. Be social.
10. Use common sense."



One word of caution, there should be no ONE person who represents your organization on social media. The most effective organizations that utilize social media are ones where EVERY person in the organization participates in their own way, and the culture of the entire organization is one way to embrace social media.. This doesn't mean that you can't identify a social media champion to lead and organize your efforts; it just means they can't be the only ones repping your organization online.

Investment: How much and where?

What I often hear cited as the primary reason for lack of investment in social media is that staff's time is already stretched too thin. An investment in social media can truly start as a very minor investment of time, this is especially true if your organization spreads the social media investment across the entire organization, instead of having one person bear the entire burden.

The first and obvious step in determining how and where to invest in social media should come from identifying your goals as an organization. That is to say, in a best case scenario, what results would your investment in social media yield? The answer to that question should drive much of your strategy and in turn, once you have identified a strategy, that should drive your implementation.

Starting with the end in mind will also keep your organization from falling into the common trap of setting up a social media venture simply because everyone else is doing it. It's also important to remember that investments in social media will often not pay off immediately, as it often takes time to build your presence online.

Another step should be to provide exclusive content: post pictures from a staff meeting, pose engaging questions to your followers, or announce a new program or initiative on your blog. Everyone wants to feel like they are receiving some premium or insider content from you, so give the people what they want!

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“Enrollment and other interesting challenges....”

Deb Bialeschki, ACA Director of Research

Most camp administrators know that last summer was a challenging year for us. Our spring “Snapshot” enrollment survey showed a camp community that was braced for a significant decrease in campers (48 % of spring respondents anticipated lower enrollments). When the Fall enrollment survey was tallied, no doubt exists that many camps struggled in summer 2009 with 49 percent indicating lower enrollments than last year. While we always have camps who say they are down on enrollment, this year we had 22% more camps experiencing lower enrolments than in 2008. However, there were also camps that had a very good summer (29% said they were higher than last year).

Several key points can be seen in the enrollment data:

Nationally, many camps experienced decreases in enrollment, but they were generally between 1-7% declines.

Total camperweeks generated in Summer 2009 remained the same as for 2008.

Camper return rates were lower in the Mid-America region with 24% of these camps below a 50% return rate compared to 33% nationally.

Similar to camps across the country, Mid-America camps viewed this summer as one of the lowest enrollments in the past five years.

The majority of camps nationally did NOT operate at capacity in summer 2009. This finding was especially true regionally where 39% of Mid-America camps did not make 80 percent capacity. When Mid-America camps were asked about targeted capacity, 53% of these camps said they achieved 90%+ of their target capacity.

The top reasons for a lower targeted capacity were: strategic reductions based on economic climate, higher quality experiences planned for fewer campers, recognition that requests don’t match based on age groups and/or week availability, and budget couldn’t support actual capacity.

Nationally, camper diversity remained unchanged or decreased slightly. However, Mid-America camps served significantly more poverty and low-income families (16 percent of their total enrollment came from these families).

Nationally, 53% of camps said they had more campers on scholarships this summer than last year with one-third saying they were up over 10%. However 59% of Mid-America camps said they had more campers on scholarship, 38% of the Mid-America camps gave between 1-30 scholarships, and only 7% of the Mid-America camps gave no scholarships.

When asked about enrollment challenges, Mid-American camp directors thought the school calendar negatively affected their enrollments more than any other region. They were similar on the other challenges.

There is no easy answer to the enrollment challenges, especially if the economy continues to improve slowly. More families will likely need financial help with sending their children to camp, and camps may need to examine the way they target their markets. The changing national demographics suggest that camps will need to draw upon minority families in the future. Perhaps the greatest challenge will be our ability to stay relevant and flexible as we advance our belief in the value of the camp experience to make a difference in the life of a child.

(For a more complete discussion, read “We’re Up, We’re down, We stayed the Same”, *Camping Magazine*, March -April, 2010 or go to the survey findings at

www.ACAcamps.org/research/improve/enrollment_recruitment_survey.php.)

Our Own Professional Development Service Center

Mary Sullivan, ACA New Jersey

There's no question about it: professional development is of enormous significance to the mission and goals of the ACA. But do we all know *exactly* what that means? Here are two official explanations:

1. Professional development refers to skills and knowledge attained for both personal development and career advancement;
2. It also refers to activities designed to maintain and enhance one's competence.

Important stuff! Valuable concepts. And ACA has long recognized that it is vital for all camp professionals to have easy access to top-notch professional development opportunities. Now we have plans in place to provide exactly that.

Plans for the launch of a new ACA Professional Development Service Center were revealed at the National Conference in February. It will involve the following three components.

- An on-line "dashboard"
- Certificates of added qualification (CCAQ) and/or Continuing Education Credits (CECs)

On-line, individual member educational portfolio

The online "dashboard" will include tools, resources, job services, calendars, course catalogs, certificate requirements and an online bookstore, as well as access to a directory of college and university programs related to camp and youth development. The service center will embrace change as a principle, and offerings will be updated as needs in the profession evolve.

You will also have the opportunity to earn certificates of added qualification (CCAQs) and/or continuing education credits (CECs) simply by attending or completing ACA programs. While the number of hours required to obtain certificates is still in development, we can already calculate how many hours various elements will provide. Attending the ACA Regional Conference, for example, will accrue 6.5-20 hours or CECs; the In-person Standards Course will provide 5 hours or CECs; and ACA selected Title Book Review will equal 4 hours or CECs. More on this as the program develops.

Another valuable tool currently being designed is called the Individual Online Portfolio. This individualized record will serve as a collection point for courses, conferences attended and other continuing education activities, enabling you to set personal goals and track credits toward completion of certificates or other self-guided paths of learning. In addition, camp and program directors will be able to use this tool to guide and direct the professional development growth of their staff.

These are exciting times for professional development throughout ACA. If you would like more information or have suggestions, please contact Mary Sullivan, Professional Development Chair, at mary@gesherfun.org.

2010 ACA Camp Visits

Ann Arbor YMCA Day Camp
Camp Birkett
Camp Crawford
Camp Deer Trails
Camp Kidwell
Camp Living Waters
Camp Michi-Lu-Ca
Camp O' The Hills
Camp Ozanam
Cavell YWCA Metro Detroit
CYO Boys
CYO Girls
Huron Forest Camp Cherith

JCC Summer Camp
Judson Collins Center
Lake Huron Retreat Center
Pine Trail Camp
Stony Lake Lutheran Camp
Summer Impressions Day Camp
Van Buren Youth Camp
Wildwood Ranch
YMCA Camp Pendalouan
YMCA Storer Camps



If your camp is not listed and you are expecting to be visited or if your camp is listed and not expecting to be visited, please contact Nancy Burger, Standards Chair. nburger@ymcastorer camps.org

A D V E R T I S E
ACA, Michigan Newsletter:
THE WOODPILE

WHY? The Woodpile is one of the main vehicles for getting the ACA's (Sectional and National) news, events, training, and information into the hands of our members, camps and other sections. Members and camps rely on The Woodpile for up-to-date news.

Deadline for the summer issue is June 1, 2010.

Call for current rates—877.823.0005.

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April 10, 2010

**Experiential Education
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In the WHO DO YOU GOODSEARCH FOR box type in: [American Camping Association](#) and your selection will appear as: American Camping Association - ACA - Michigan (Grand Rapids, MI).

What's up, Camp Doc?

Hi ACA-Michigan,

My name is Michael Ambrose and I am a fourth year medical student at the University of Michigan entering the field of pediatrics. I have spent eight summers working in a medical clinic at a large summer camp in southeastern Michigan. With input from our camp doctors and nurses, I created an online health management system, called CampDoc, to improve efficiency and camper safety at our camp.

Our camp spent significant time and energy maintaining the ACA health log requirement. With the system I created, logging clinic visits became much more efficient and most importantly, useful. We now document clinic visits in the CampDoc electronic health log, and can search and analyze visits by camper name, diagnosis, session or bunk. Our camp also spent a great deal of time organizing and administering medications - camper check-in was extremely hectic! With the CampDoc online medication management system I created, we are now able to generate pre-printed medication administration records (MARs) and medication labels for each camper, eliminating the problem of illegible parent handwriting, helping reduce the chances of preventable medication errors and making medication distribution more efficient throughout the summer.

I designed the CampDoc system specifically for camps, with the goal of consolidating and integrating camper health information into a centralized and secure location that gives camp doctors and nurses instant access to camper health information, a key component in providing quality patient care.

I appreciate the warm welcome to the ACA-Michigan family and am excited to share CampDoc with your community - I look forward to learning more about all of you and your camps!

Michael Ambrose
CampDoc LLC
www.campdoc.com

Social Media

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Virtual vs. Natural

One of the toughest questions we face in the camping movement is growing paradox between the virtual and natural worlds. Obviously one of the greatest values of our movement is the connection to the out of doors and the natural world. In an increasingly virtual world, our camps provide a disconnect from the seem-

ingly constantly plugged in world, and an increased awareness of the natural world around us. Thus is the paradox, as we, the beacons of the natural world, are trying (just like every other organization) to have a greater presence virtually.

Frankly, I believe this is an opportunity for our camping movement to be leaders in addressing this issue. We're already experts on the natural world, if we can increase our knowledge of the virtual world, we will be

uniquely situated to address this growing social issue. Because this issue is so large and complex, it's a conversation that we need to continue to have.

To comment on this article and continue this dialogue online or to read this article in it's entirety please visit ACA, MI page at **Facebook./ACAMichigan**.



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electronic medical record and online medication management systems designed specifically for camps

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Volunteers Wanted!!!

ACA, Michigan is a completely volunteer-run section, with the exception of our Theresa. The Board of Directors is currently looking to fill the following volunteer positions:

**Membership Chair
Camp Leadership Institute Chair
Awards/Recognition Chair
And various committees**

If you or someone you know is interested in volunteering in one of the above positions, please contact Theresa Walker at executive@aca-michigan.org.

Office Hours

Mon & Wed: 9—1

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