

The Outdoor Experience - Going from Good to Great

March 4, 2010

Girl Scouts of all ages agree that camping and the overall outdoor experience are and always will be a Girl Scout tradition. The business planning process has reconfirmed the value of this long-standing tradition and the lasting impact it has had and will continue to have on so many. This same process has also **strengthened and solidified our council's commitment to making sure that it continues to be an integral part of our future.**

Facing unprecedented financial challenges and declining membership rates, our Board of Directors has looked long and hard at the different ways that we, as a council, can overcome these challenges while holding fast to our mission and commitment to helping today's girls become tomorrow's leaders. In November 2009, a plan was shared with volunteers, girls, parents, donors and community partners that outlined two priorities: the Experiences that Build Leaders and the People who Make It Happen.

Over the course of the business planning process, the outdoor experience quickly rose to the top as the most distinctive Girl Scout experience (past, present and future) and one that uniquely bonds all Girl Scouts of all ages together. **The Board, without question, agreed that providing an outdoor experience that combines many of the traditional components that have always been a part of camping with the interests of today's girls needs to be more of a priority than it has been in recent years.**

Given our council's limited resources, the Board also agreed that investing in the outdoor experience and taking it from good to great was neither realistic nor feasible at all twelve of our current camp properties. Our Board soon came to a crossroads; either continue to try to manage all twelve with very limited opportunity for any type of capital or programmatic improvements or reduce the number of camp properties and truly commit to taking the quality of the outdoor experience that we offer for both our girls and our volunteers to a whole new level.

This decision was not taken lightly. Our Board analyzed data and recommendations from the Long Range Property Task Group's 2009 report. They also evaluated current and future usage, current and future programming opportunities, and current and anticipated overhead, capital and regular maintenance costs. They looked at the locations of all twelve camps and their proximity to where girls live within each of our five regions. **They talked about the deep connections many of our alumnae have to all of our camps** – from both their experiences as girls and the blood, sweat and tears so many have contributed as adults – **and struggled with how to make a decision that would strike the right balance of logic and passion in the minds and hearts of our membership.**

But in the end, the Board agreed that investing in seven camps today would mean greater future opportunities for our girls, our volunteers and our council as a whole. Together, the Board came to a unanimous decision to invest in the following seven camp properties:

- ❖ **Camp Archbald is located in Susquehanna County in the Northeast region** of our council. It is fully accredited by the American Camp Association (ACA) and is the second oldest Girl Scout camp in the country. This 288 acre camp offers overnight visitors with a variety of accommodations - closed Adirondacks, cabins, tents and houseboats. Combined with a riding stable, its waterfront access to Lake Ely and hiking trails, the camp complements its diverse accommodations with a variety of activities.
- ❖ **Camp Echo Trail is located in York County in the South region** of our council. It is also accredited by the American Camp Association (ACA). This 315 acre camp runs parallel to the banks of the Susquehanna River and has wide open field areas suitable for numerous sporting activities, a challenge course, an archery field and a swimming pool. The facilities at Echo Trail include modern lodges, rustic Adirondack huts and an Indian Meadows tepee unit.
- ❖ **Camp Furnace Hills is located in Lancaster County in the South region** of our council. This 325 acre camp is adjacent to the Middlecreek Wildlife Preserve and also serves as home to the historic 19th century bank house known as Foxfire House. Camp Furnace Hills is accredited by the American Camp Association (ACA) and offers a variety of accommodations for overnight visitors ranging from modern facilities to more rustic cabins and tents. The camp property also includes access to a natural waterway, a swimming pool and an archery field.
- ❖ **Camp Golden Pond is located in Huntingdon County in the West region** of our council. This 297 acre property itself borders the seven acre man-made lake known as Lake Louise where kayaking and canoeing have quickly become favorite pastimes. It also boasts a variety of nature paths and hiking trails.
- ❖ **Camp Happy Valley is located in Adams County in the South region** of our council. This 57 acre camp provides year-round visitors with the perfect mix of primitive and/or modern camping facilities. Its close proximity to historic Gettysburg encourages visitors to connect with both our nation's past and Mother Nature.
- ❖ **Camp Louise is located in Columbia County in the North region** of our council. Also accredited by the American Camping Association (ACA), its close proximity to Sunset Lake combined with the stream that runs through its 340 acres make it the ideal location for water activities and environmental stream studies. The camp's accommodations include modern buildings with running water and flush toilets and more primitive tents and cabin units with latrines.
- ❖ **Camp Small Valley is located in Dauphin County in the South Central region** of our council. This 762 acre property includes year-round heated units, rustic cabins and tents, a swimming pool, a horse riding ring and extensive hiking trails. It also serves as home to the STAR (Science Technology and Adventure Researchers) Center.

By identifying these seven key camps, our Board of Directors also identified the five camps - Camp El Wa Ho, Camp Gi Sco Ha, Camp Laurel, Camp Lycogis, and Camp Pocono - whose use will be discontinued indefinitely. **While next steps for these five camps are still being finalized, reservations will no longer be accepted for any of these sites. All confirmed reservations will be honored.**

The selection of the seven key camps is the first step in a very important process. **A task force representing a mix of our stakeholders will now begin to define what a great outdoor experience – one that we can all be proud of - will look like.** The group will focus much of its attention on the following issues:

- ❖ **Outdoor Programming Expertise** – How can we provide outdoor programming expertise at each of our camps and shift away from the expectation that all of our volunteer leaders also need to be outdoor experts in order to give their troops a great outdoor experience?
- ❖ **Camp-Specific Niche Programming** – How can we develop the seven key camps so that each attracts girls with special interests (from science to the environment, from canoeing to horseback riding, etc)? And how can we more closely connect the special experiences at each of the camps with the badges, journeys and awards that girls may be working on?
- ❖ **Fee Structure** – What does a mission-based fee structure that takes into account accommodations, activities and length of stay look like?
- ❖ **Promotion** – How should we market our camps to both internal and external audiences and increase overall utilization of all seven camps?
- ❖ **Accessibility** – How can we help girls and volunteers better connect with the wide range of outdoor experiences and programming opportunities that exist close to their homes even if they are not owned by our council?

The overall work of the outdoor programming task force will result in a plan that will match our resources, our mission and traditions, our potential and, most importantly, the interests of our girls with a realistic timeline for implementation. We anticipate that the work of this group will wrap up as early as summer 2010.

We will continue to keep you updated as the implementation of the business plan continues. As always, your opinion continues to be important to us and we encourage you to share your feedback at <http://www.gshpa.org/feedback.html>.