

## **Camp NeeKauNis (NKN) Consultation, Friday July 22, 2011.**

**The following are Steve Heming's questions/ comments/ observations and advice in preparation for the consultation. It also includes findings and assessment based on the actual 6 hours spent at NKN. As the day was a conversation hitting many, many areas, this document follows in that same fashion.**

**Please Note: The original bullets with non-italicized words are the original 'Steve Heming Notes' made in preparation for the visit. The *Italicized words* are further Steve (and Rob) Heming thoughts for consideration by the NKN committee after spending the day with the 15 or so NKN volunteers/committee members that participated.**

**Please also note that minutes were taken by Katrina, where the bulk of the meeting discussion points are captured. There were many excellent comments made throughout the day on a variety of subjects and they may only be found in the minutes and not this document. It is hoped that both the minutes and this document will be used together as the camp committee moves forward with its strategic planning.**

**Thanks for creating the opportunity for consultation!**

## The Request for Consultation

- The request to Steve Heming from George Ivanoff was to spend a day with him and other camp committee members and: to give an honest assessment of facilities; to use YMCA Wanakita as a case study and speak to its successes and talk about the path that took it there; to guide open discussion workshops on facilities, programs, cost, staffing and implementation strategy of current vision etc. There is a general feeling that things have slipped at NKN and that outside thoughts might be beneficial to the camp.
- Steve Heming (the consultant)...background ~ 32 years full time, 8 yrs part time at YMCA Wanakita; just stepping down from GM Position October 2010; Chair of Ontario YMCA camps Workgroup (15 camps from 10 different YMCA Associations); Honourary Life Member of the Ontario Camping Association (350 members); Served on a variety of related committees and Boards over the years; Bachelor Of Human Kinetics; Bachelor of Education. *{In fact, Rob Heming joined Steve for the morning session as a volunteer consultant. Rob has had years of experience in the field and currently resides in Penetang and works in real-estate buying and selling camps. Rob brought forward some excellent information related to the local municipality, as he is a resident}.*
- Using as a case study, YMCA Wanakita ( a not for profit, charitable camp that is a branch of the YMCA of Hamilton/Burlington/Brantford), is a 3.5 million dollar year round operation with 13,000 participants/year, 18 year round staff utilizing 350 volunteers annually and over 200 part time staff. 1000 acres, 1.5 k of shoreline with 135 buildings and related program resources to run hundreds of programs annually. Its roots...., a private coed camp started in the 1930's taken over by the YMCA in 1953 as a summer boy's camp of capacity for 125, completely run by volunteers, with work weekends to clean and build. Size and scope began to change in late 60's when introduced girl's camps, family camp and non summer programs....

**The following are questions and observations that framed the consultation. Also included are the answers, comments or areas for further consideration:**

1) **Web site** pretty good in describing what the camp is and why. *{Yet, it may not **'tell the story'** that really lets people know what makes it special and how it impacts...need to think about how to fully utilize the website and other web – based tools like, email and Facebook to connect with current and potential campers}.*

2) The camp may be trying to be more than it should be before proper planning. **Scenario development may be a process to explore in order to clarify direction.** *{Have you decided on what kind of camp you are and where you will be with this in 5 or 10 years? Do you want things to be status quo....do you want to downsize and focus, or possibly expand in some way. Many different criteria guide the process (mission and vision, to 'readiness to change' of volunteers or camper/clients, market capacity, financial benefits/drawbacks, environmental impact etc....regardless of the chosen criteria, make it consistent)}*

3) Some good **visioning has already occurred** but it has been hard to implement. I especially liked the three Strategic Vision pieces and related objectives from 2002. What is current now? What has been **accomplished since 07?** Do you **walk the talk?** Is there **unity** with the vision? What has been accomplished and is it written down. *(After discussions, I would suggest that there are key issues in the visioning process as relates to unity and clarity of thought. As well, there have been major breakdowns in implementation of the vision with a lack of consistent leadership for the process. Although this challenge has been recognized, it still seems very difficult for everyone to follow a system of implementation. Some good things have happened since 2007 but not enough to stop the slide. Perhaps, as Rob Heming observed, this slide has been happening for much longer than originally realized}*

4) **Potential volunteer fatigue. How does the camp rejuvenate volunteers? Are successes celebrated?** *{ I would say that this may be volunteer fatigue along with many other factors that keeps potential volunteers away or are not doing the job as they used to. As discussed, there is no real celebration of*

*accomplishments such as milestones for those involved for 5 or 50 years. Volunteerism in our society has changed dramatically over the last 20 years. The camp needs to adapt to current volunteer trends}.*

5) When the 2007 NKN vision says that more people need to attend, does that mean **internal Friends or external** other? Which time of year and which programs needs to grow? *This question was not directly addressed.*

6) I agree with **guiding principles** piece from 06 Vision process. Has this been solidified? This must be done to move forward properly in other areas. *{Clarify if this vision still holds true for 2011 and is everyone united to move it forward}*

7) a) What are **philanthropic/fundraising efforts** outside of people power on work camps? *{Is there opportunity to fundraise? **The answer will need to be yes** if there is any hope of really revitalizing the camp which is what I glean as the **major "needs to happen"**.....For example, the Rogers family.....start asking who is connected to the camp, knows the story and would be excited to contribute to the vision to the future}*

7) b) **Annual financial, administration, resources and capital.** *{Was touched on but no real discussion in this area ~Sounded a bit muddy (as in administrative practices), clarity or adjustment of systems is needed across the board}. Sounds like there was a pot of money to draw on to help facilities but those dollars don't go a long way.*

8) There appears to be great potential in the **Advocate program.** How is it going? Is there alumni development with things like specific Camp Reunions? *{Not many in the room knew of the Advocate program even though it is identified on the web site so...that should send a clear message about internal volunteer communication and recruitment practices}.*

9) What is the **leadership model for decision making/governance?** Knowing this is crucial to drive things forward. How is this currently happening? *{Wow!! There was lots of discussion in this area. The minutes by Katrina should pick up the various thoughts. I would say that this is where the most work needs to be done. There seems to be gaps in many directions and that may be why implementation of plans is not going as initially intended}*

10) Active **volunteer recruitment** {see comments related to advocate program and volunteer fatigue. This is certainly a great opportunity to learn and grow in this area}.

11) It appears that there are a lot of second and third maybe even 4th **generation families who attend NKN**. If this is the case, it should be a resource to be utilized and celebrated. *This question was not addressed during the consultation.*

12) **Is NKN a priority within Quaker Canada?** (or whoever might be the ownership/political/purse strings of the camp... {This was discussed and it seems that the camp is not high up on the radar. Yet, there was talk that efforts are being made to change this}.

13) Identified **Shortcomings or Challenges** (*did not do officially as a workshop exercise, although some ideas were picked up through discussions*)

14) **Program/ food/facility/volunteer staff as related to Quality...How currently measured? What is the overall evaluation process?** {*It seems that there is no client or volunteer evaluation/feedback system in place to get real data on what users and volunteers really think about their overall experience. People in the room felt things were going OK but had no proof. The downward enrolment in some programs is just one indicator that things might not be on track.*}

15) **Return rates and client recruitment ~ Enrolment statistics...tracking.....** {*No one knew their return rates which would be key indicator of success*} Some thought that things were ok but without real numbers, how one feels does not cut it. *Solid work is needed in this area*}. .

16) **Are there Market strategies outside of web, word of mouth and Advocate program?** {*Didn't really get into this but would be key strategy to develop to increase users*}

17) **Risk Management**...all the different kinds {*no extended discussion in this area however I believe plenty of work needed to be done. For instance, there are no Criminal Reference Checks; written risk management policies are*

*needed for each program and program area as well as kitchen, abuse protocols, etc....}*

**18) Program Development.** *[No extended discussion in this area however, great potential for growth in current and new areas that could relate to putting increasing enrolment or “putting heads in beds”.]*

**19) Are there other Quaker Camps...USA? Is there any Networking?** Any links with the Ontario Camping Association, CCI (for religiously affiliated camps), and local camps etc....*This area was briefly touched upon but needs exploration.*

**20) Fees/Rates** ~ after reviewing the rates, I do see a rhyme and reason and relation to similar programs across the season. In my opinion the off summer season's rates are too low. Family kids too low....2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> kids too low. Other rates are probably on the mark. Need to create sense of urgency to register. No early bird. Longer stays should be rewarded with cheaper rate. *Due to time constraints, these observations and ideas were not discussed.*

## Keys to Success at YMCA Wanakita over the years:

Steve was asked to think about and present the keys that have made YMCA Wanakita successful. The following was the short list of thoughts that were discussed during the afternoon workshop. Any discussion points to the Keys should be found in Katrina's minutes.

- .1. **Consistency in leadership**..... Not only in the camp staff and volunteer areas but within Board of Directors and CEO's and that the message of how important Wanakita was within the overall Y would not be lost even through major transmissions. (ie., Only 3 senior directors since 1973).
- .2. **Staff and volunteer** training. All levels of training all depts.
- .3. **Succession** planning at all levels all depts.
- .4. **Strategic planning** process always in place. Allowed the camp to take advantage of many opportunities. We could make the moves and implement because we were ready with a plan. 5 year capital development strategies guided everything. Therefore, the camp was and is able to keep 'the place' from running down and keep up with the times.
- .5. **People power** (a major strength of NKN).....Thousands of volunteers have helped at work camps over the decades; hundreds of volunteers with fundraising programs; thousands of staff have delivered programs that had significant impact on people's lives... **Recruitment protocols crucial across the board.**
- .6. **Due diligence...market studies were done**...vision committees were struck to help create the plans...sometimes two steps forward one step back until we got it right. Research...is having all the answers in place before approvals. Scenario development has been crucial to ensure all avenues were explored. I and others took the time to travel to other camps, even to USA camps and conferences to check in with people already successful with

certain programs, facility changes/growth...if travel isn't feasible, then the internet and phone are used to connect with others.

- .7. **Network, Alumni development and partnerships...**Telling your **Story**.....As examples; a Hemophilia Ontario/Wanakita partnership started in 1992 which led to a very sizeable donation by Corporate sponsor in 2003;..... Reach for Rainbow partnership involves campers with disabilities which brings inclusiveness and diversity to the camp;...Strong relationships with a number of Boards of Education and private schools to involve 1000's of students annually participating in enviro programs, including helping (through sponsorship) lower income neighbourhood students;..... Alumni development programs helped move the camp to raise 3.5M over a 5 year period. Connections lead to connections. Being able to '**tell your story**' moves people to become involved;...touring other camps and hearing their stories dramatically impacted decision making.....
- .8. Understanding **current trends and community needs**....Examples.....Starting 8 new weeks of Family Camp where there was only one; adding one week camps instead of only having two week camps; understanding changing food preferences and special food needs; understanding 'helicopter parents' and creating related policies; recognizing curriculum changes in Ont and OPHEA mandated policies which impact outdoor education programs; Ready to adapt to the changing needs of community.
- .9. **Stick to the knitting**....kids will always canoe at Wanakita and will always be involved in campfires. Camp is co-ed with small cabin groups that spend their entire camp session together. This is not negotiable.... What is the essence of camp? What is the camps culture? Is Camp about building relationships (life-long friendships)? Therefore, what does the camp do to ensure this always happens?

.10. Continuous **Evaluation**. Made the changes that needed to be made. Listened to staff and clients and volunteers. The key....always ask for input.

### **Other Questions to ponder:**

- ❖ **What are current Trends, Challenges and Opportunities?**
- ❖ **What is it that makes NeeKauNis Special? What is the Program Culture.**
- ❖ **Program Philosophy...current is co-ed; democratic group living; one age group or type of group at a time. Is programming Progressive... group or individually oriented? Is how you operate giving you the biggest bang....? How does NKN programs fit within other Religiously affiliated camps.**
- ❖ **There are specific Director(s) for each NKN program. Is there a standard that all go by and is there a senior Director or administrator who can have the authority (by consensus), to make sure a plan is effected and implemented?**
- ❖ **Capital (Asset) Development Plan. Who knows when shingles need to be replaced, buildings painted. Who plans short and long term**
- ❖ **Why do you think you are slipping...? Indicators**
- ❖ **What have you tried that isn't working.**

### **Some Overall Impressions:**

- **Facilities....** only in poor to fair condition. The look of the place shows it to be very tired and needing some quick fixes like paint and new signage and some big fixes (outhouses, waterfront, cabins and more). Great potential for new and improved programs to be added on site (ie., ropes course towards adding a wow and serving more people). Lots of room for growth and/or to keep what's current and raise the bar.
- **Love** and the feeling of ownership for the camp abounds. Camp feels good because of the people. Lots and lots of happy campers!!! This may be not enough as you move forward. This love and happiness needs to be channelled to take the camp to next level. Someone or a team of **people need to take charge** to drive plans forward or the camp will continuing slowly loosing ground.
- **Internal volunteer Communication** needs a tremendous amount of tweaking. There are systems in place but all are not functioning. This is at more of the committee and Yearly Meeting level.
- Need to **remain viable and relevant** as a camp operation and therefore need to identify and concentrate on your most important programs first and then build upwards.
- People power is your most important asset. A new plan needs to be put in place that addresses recruitment, CRC's, training, contracts etc.... There are plenty of gaps in the current plan.
- Implement some short surveys/questionnaires to attain relevant data towards strategic planning.