

**Notes on a meeting with Steve Heming at Camp NeeKauNis
Friday July 22, 2011**

Morning Session

We met at 9:30 am with Steve and Rob Heming and conducted a tour of camp cabins, the front of the property, the “Camp House” waterfront, Nelson-Hall and finally Meeting Centre, where we gathered with about 20 Friends.

Steve introduced himself and described his experience at Camp Wanakita, run by the Hamilton/Burlington/Brantford YMCA. His brother, Rob, introduced himself as having run the Bark Lake Leadership Centre and the Wye Marsh. He now assists camp buy, sell and develop properties.

They felt that the OCA (Ontario Camping Association) and the CCI (Christian Camping International) are both important organizations and provide much benefit to their members.

The Girls Guides in Canada own 41 camps and are selling 17 of them. Wanakita grew from 150 people per camp to over 800. Last year they had 220 summer staff and 15 full time all year staff.

Steve asked us what we thought were the reasons for Camp’s decline in numbers:

- Demographics: number of young Friends
- Lack of personal connections (Need more Rachel Sheardowns!)
- Tired facilities – people spread rumours that camp is run down
- Volunteer fatigue
- Committee politics – we don’t always work together well
- No one holds people leading a task responsible for getting it done.

Other suggestions from Steve & Rob:

- no formal evaluation process for camps and campers
- No formal process of “graduating” from camp to camp (eg Junior to Intermediate)
- Consistency
- “Clarity of Offer” : Is it clear what we must offer
 - in programs
 - to volunteers
 - in facilities
 - in our vision
- Do we know our total number of campers for each camp, for the year, for 5 years?
- What is our return rate of campers? Of volunteers?
- Evaluation is crucial
- Call people to ask them to come to camp!

Rob and Steve suggested that one central feature that seems to be missing is Consistency of Leadership between camps.

We would benefit tremendously from a full-time executive director. It could be for only four months of the season; a university student; paid about \$1000-\$1500 per month; there are grants available to help us hire such a person.

They then shared their impressions of how to easily improve camp:

- Sign on the road
- Gateway feature to signify entry into NeeKauNis
- Old crappy cabins must be made beautiful (spruced –up with paint)
- Parking is ill-defined
- No sense of where to go once you come in
- Ill defined centre of camp
- Signs for main buildings
- Ratty volleyball must be improve – it looks bad
- Ratty basketball “ “ “ “
- Ratty looking flower beds
- Water front needs to be a showcase _ it needs to be much better defined, pretty and inviting. It needs to be a “wow!” factor
- Must replace KYBO’s, at least with composting toilets
- Must have clean central showers
- De-clutter Nelson – Hall (also Meeting Centre)
- Move workshop to a side location and improve its looks – make it a good shop
- Cabins are OK on the inside, but extremely old looking on the outside
- Use consistent trim, steps and doors for all the cabins. Eg, paint all the doors with different pictures, but use the same colour for the trim and windows
- Have a 2-3 year painting schedule and keep to it religiously

They also suggested we talk to the many other camps in the area (Two “Y” camps on Beausalais, Catholic camp in Penetang, a United Church camp in Midland), as well as other Quaker Camps.

Afternoon Session

Wanakita is the largest “Y” camp in Canada, but many of the 280 Y camps in the US are larger, some with 4 Star hotels!

A Police Check of every person in a staff position is a MUST!

Key reasons for success of Wanakita:

1. Consistency of leadership, with progressive improvements
2. Senior staff & volunteer training is crucial. They spend a lot of time on succession planning, mentoring and recruitment.

3. Key message is always central: The culture of the place must be nourished.
4. Spend much time on Maintenance and Food Services, so people are satisfied
5. Have a 5 and 10 year plan for development; do scenario development and carefully select criteria to evaluate scenerios.
6. Choose the right people for committees
7. Due diligence: do market studies, visit other camps, network. OCA very valuable for that.
8. Leadership training program is the most important program!
 - 1st year they teach the hard skills (grade 10) canoe, kayak etc
 - 2nd year they teach soft skills (grade 11) behaviour, people skills
 - They charge \$2000 for one month of training; have a waiting list
 - After they graduate they can become staff (paid about \$1/hour!)
 - Strict guidelines between staff and campers is important
9. They look for partnership opportunities. Eg hemophiliacs & Bayer
10. “Know your story”. What does your camp offer the world? What does it actually do? Prove it and then you are able to go to donors, say it and ASK!
11. Know current events and needs – “Trending”
12. Offer enticing programs – ask campers what they want more of or new.
13. Food offerings must be current. Bend for the vegetarian, vegan, wheatless, etc
14. Stick to what holds camp together; what is the “knitting” (for NKN – talent night; dishwashing; evening games)
15. Evaluate each program and ask campers for feedback while they are at camp, to get as much feedback as possible

Develop a strategic plan with components such as waterfront, kitchen, entry, programs, etc. Develop it after evaluating scenarios.

My ideas for scenerios:

1. Keep camp essentially as is but with improved facilities as listed above (sign on road, etc).
2. Expand camp facilities, add cabins, expand waterfront.....
3. Double up on camp programs or have multiple programs at the same time, such as junior camp and intermediate.

Wanakita's most popular programs are, in order:

1. Arts and Crafts
2. Ropes Course
3. Theatre Program (drama, music and dance)

End of GI's notes.