

## Thank you, Jack!

### The inside story on what lies ahead after a five-decade career

**A**fter a career spanning 50 years, **Jack Erler** is ready to channel his boundless energy and equally impressive range of interests into new adventures. It's a pivot from a passion for youth camping toward . . . well, you name it.

Ellen Chapman, Jack's wife of 37 years, knows: Jack will undoubtedly stay busy, with her alongside him. She says they passed the pandemic togetherness challenge "with flying colors" – now they may be limited only by the ongoing impact of COVID.

No matter, though. With projects at two homes – a 1787 house in Maine and a second home in Culebra, Puerto Rico – the couple will have no shortage of outdoor tasks. "Jack is lawns and I'm gardens," Ellen wrote in an email from Culebra. Then there's the recreation. Hiking and walking are high on the list, she says, as is travel within Maine, the U.S. and abroad. Visiting family and friends is a high priority. And though COVID-19 makes specifics difficult to plan, Ellen says they'll have plenty to do. Ellen closed her massage therapy practice in March, so she's fully on board.

"What we do know is that we'll spend most of the winter here in Culebra," she shared. "We swim, walk the beach, snorkel, work in the yard and gardens, entertain and be entertained by our close group of friends here." Then there's hosting guests from Maine. And, back in Maine, travel to visit family and friends, and possibly finding chances to volunteer. Projects, of course, abound, and, with COVID's cooperation, there's the opportunity to attend productions of the Maine State Music Theater.

"Maybe we'll even relax and get caught up on some light reading!"

Whether it's in Maine or Culebra, Jack's days will be filled with activities he loves. And it begs some questions: Why didn't he retire sooner? Or why is he retiring now? "It's the right time," Ellen says. "If not now, when?"



### Celebration Luncheon for Jack Erler Saturday, June 4 at Wyonegonic Camps

There is likely no way to truly express MSC members' gratitude for Jack Erler's contributions, but a full and joyful effort will be made at a luncheon in Jack's honor on Saturday, June 4.

Slated for 12:30 p.m. at Wyonegonic Camps' Cobb Dining Hall in Denmark, the rain-or-shine event will be a chance for all of Jack's many camp fans and colleagues to wish him well.

The organization is requesting a \$20 contribution per person, which will be earmarked for the Level Ground initiative in Jack's honor.

We hope you will join us at the gathering to celebrate Jack's legacy and contributions to the Maine youth camping industry.



**Please register for the luncheon by May 20 using this link.**

**Thank you, Jack Erler** continues on page 4.

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## MESSAGE FROM THE MSC PRESIDENT

APRIL 2022

*Spring is here, with the beautiful birds returning, the grass turning green, the trees starting to bud, and ice out of our lakes.*

*Just as the birds have returned, it was wonderful to return to seeing and connecting with so many MSC members and business members in person at the American Camp Association, New England conference in Manchester last month. One highlight was a social gathering hosted by MSC; it was well attended, and we plan to make it an annual event.*

*I also want to report on the progress of the Executive Director Search Committee. The search committee has been meeting regularly and is excited to be working with Ashley Adams of Career Management Associates (CMA) a human resources firm operating out of Portland, Maine. We are currently gathering all the necessary information for the executive director job posting. Ashley will also host a virtual meeting on May 6 at 9 am for MSC members to provide input regarding the executive director position. You find more information and a link to register in upcoming Hall Monitors.*

*MSC has also been hard at work over the past seven months to provide many offerings to its members, including virtual workshops, casual conversations, book clubs and educational opportunities. My hope is you are able to utilize and put into practice all the learning and growing that you have invested in over the winter months to positively impact campers, staff, parents and staff at your camp.*

*As our focus starts to shift towards our own camp communities, I wish you all an incredible summer filled with fun, laughter, connection, and fulfillment.*

Warmly, Beigette



## Welcome New Camps

### Debate Camp

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Kelsey Schott  
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### Avid4 Adventure

**Avid4 Adventure** is a new Maine summer day camp in Falmouth. Our instructors help K-7th graders, from beginners to active and outdoorsy, explore the world around them. Activities include rock climbing, mountain biking, kayaking, and more. Our trained staff empower kids to say goodbye to screens and hello to adventure.

Ryne Willis  
207.873.0684  
[ryne@avid4.com](mailto:ryne@avid4.com)





## Annual Meeting Date Announced *Thank you, Migis Lodge!*

Our 2022 Annual Meeting will take place on **Wednesday, September 21 at Migis Lodge**. This will be the first time in three years that we have held the meeting in-person and not on Zoom. The meeting will begin at 10 am but you are encouraged to arrive early. Coffee and muffins will be available at 9 am.

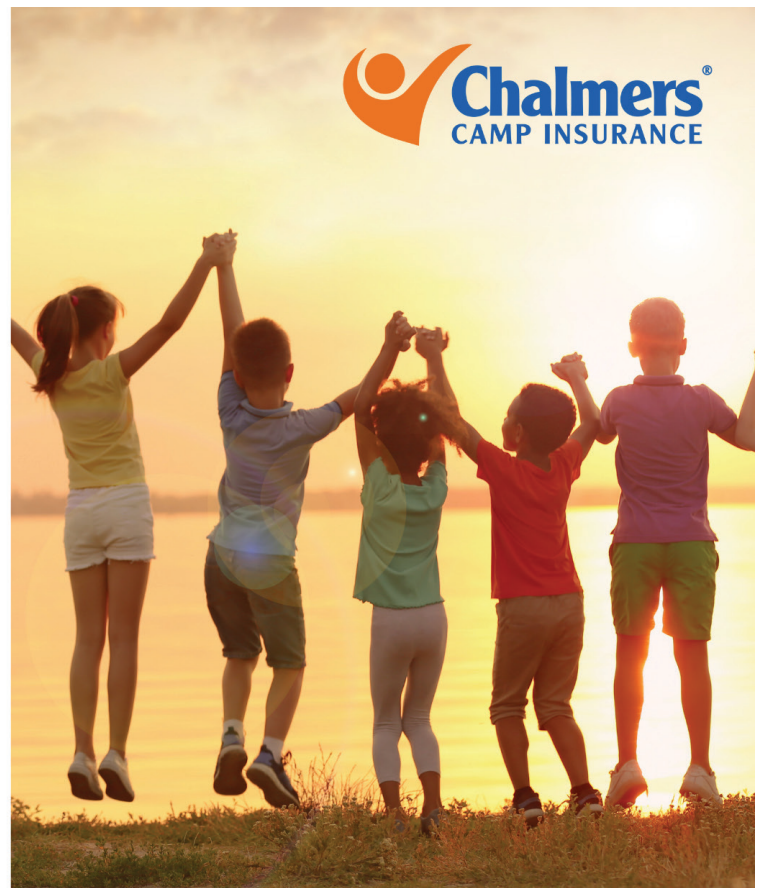
Following the annual meeting, Migis will treat us to their renowned gourmet cookout. During the cookout this year's recipient of the Halsey Gulick will be announced. Registration for the meeting will open on August 15.

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## Thank you, Jack Erler *continued from cover page*

"He likes to believe he has moved 'the great wheel in the sky' forward a bit and is proud of all he has done in support of camps and, especially, children. I don't think he will ever truly leave the camping world, but we are off to the next chapter," she says.

Jack's former assistant at Curtis Thaxter, Patti Smith, says Jack's career spanned five decades "for one simple reason. He loves, loves what he does."

Not surprisingly, Patti also praised Jack's collegiality. "All of this is not news to you; it really was a pleasure working with him." She says he also taught her a great deal. And then there's his energy. "I will miss most his energy." And as Jack and Ellen look ahead, Patti is hopeful and sure. "I just hope that he can enjoy the downtime and continue to stay active. They are going to have a blast together."

Indeed, they are. Travel, projects, friends, adventure. The future is rich.

"Jack leaves his role with MCS with a very heavy heart," Ellen says. The hearts of MSC leadership and members are heavy, too. We couldn't be more grateful for Jack's countless contributions of education, advocacy, and legislative prowess in Augusta. Yet we are delighted that he and Ellen can now team up for retirement endeavors.

"Jack and I have a very close and loving relationship," Ellen says. "We are both looking forward to spending lots of time together."

Cheers, Jack and Ellen. Here's to that time together, enjoying all your adventures. We wish you both the very best. ■

## Webinar: Addressing Land Acknowledgements of Indigenous Territories

Dr. Darren Ranco, Tuesday, April 26, 11 am – Noon

Following MSC's January educational workshop focusing on white privilege and appropriation of native culture, the Education Committee is organizing sessions that support camps in their next steps toward great understanding of and collaboration with our Indigenous neighbors.

We begin with Land Acknowledgements. Where do Land Acknowledgements of Indigenous territories come from? What is their purpose? What sorts of collaborations and working relationships can they lead to?

In this workshop, **Dr. Darren Ranco**, Professor of Anthropology and Chair of Native American Programs at the University of Maine, will present the history and purpose of Indigenous territory land acknowledgements and will offer some examples and best practices. Dr. Ranco will emphasize the ways in which these acknowledgements lead to greater collaborations with Indigenous people and Nations, and how they should not be used as a single space for organizations to create "feel-good" moments. This webinar promises to provide learning that will be both compelling and actionable for all member camps.



[Click here to register for the April 26 Webinar](#)

*This webinar is sponsored by Chalmers Insurance Group and Redwoods Group.*



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# Congratulations to two MSC Professionals, Awarded ACA, New England Leadership and Service Awards

**MSC** is proud to celebrate the commitment and efforts of **Kristy Harvey** (Camp Wawenock) and **Carly Vargas** (Kamp Kohut), who were recognized at the ACA, New England Conference last month as recipients of the Leadership and Service Award.

The impact of these two associate camp directors' works is broad and deep. In presenting the award to **Kristy Harvey**, Mike Katz (Camp Sunshine) of the ACA, New England Stewardship Committee acknowledged her role as chair of the MSC Outreach Committee, facilitating volunteer opportunities for camp professionals, as well as her efforts as tutoring immigrant students in English and also helping to launch the EPIC lunchtime conversation initiative.



**Kristy Harvey (Camp Wawenock) was honored with a Leadership and Service Award as chair of the MSC Outreach Committee, facilitating volunteer opportunities for camp professionals, as well as her efforts as tutoring immigrant students in English.**

Kristy “inspires and encourages others to get involved, and she provides the platform to do so thorough her leadership, enthusiasm and innovative ideas,” Mike said. “Her efforts have been instrumental in connecting and growing the camp community, especially within the ranks of our young camp professionals.”

“This individual exemplifies the characteristics of what a good leader is and the effect they have on those around them,” Mike concluded.



**Carly Vargas (Kamp Kohut) was honored with a Leadership and Service Award as an active ACA, New England volunteer, Carly's role as a board member, a DEIB committee member, and as a conference committee and EPIC member.**

Praise for **Carly Vargas** was equally high. As an active ACA, New England volunteer, Carly's role as a board member, a DEIB committee member, and a conference committee and EPIC member were touted.

“Carly is always willing to jump in,” said Stewardship Committee Chair Keith Garbart (Winding Trails Day Camp). “She has facilitated webinars, connected EPIC members to the conference committee, and raised an impressive amount of money for our Fund for the Future.”

In concluding the presentation, Garbart said “Her passion toward camping and dedication to our association is immeasurable . . . We are so very fortunate to have her in our mix and thrilled to honor her in this way.

MSC is equally thrilled, and appreciative of Kristy and Carly's impressive contributions. **Congratulations to them both.** ■



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## Maine Department of Education Seeks to Collaborate with Camps to Promote K-12 Positions

**M**aine's Department of Education (Office of Innovation and RREV Initiative) is interested in talking to your camp's seasonal staff this summer about employment opportunities in Maine K-12 public schools.

*Maine's Department of Education wants to speak to your staff during staff week about opportunities to work in Maine schools this fall, or about available resources to help them on the path to becoming a teacher in Maine.*

As you are likely aware, Maine schools are facing a workforce shortage, a shortage that will grow worse over the next several years. If not addressed, this shortage will impact all of Maine's businesses and organizations. And we may be able to help.

Collectively, Maine camps employ several thousand amazing seasonal staff who love kids, and love Maine. As far as prerequisites for being a teacher in Maine, these are two vital!

In addition, summer staff are somewhat flexible in their future plans, and are trying to work out what career is right for them.

DoE recognizes what we in camping have known forever – that great camp counselors make exceptional educators. The skills learned in camp — particularly things like behavior management, rapport building, and striking the right balance between fun and learning – transfer very well into the classroom.

DoE wants to speak to your staff during staff week about opportunities to work in Maine schools this fall, or about available resources to help them on the path to becoming a teacher in Maine.

If you would like to know more, you can contact Martin Mackey, Program Director of RREV, Mackey, Martin Martin. Mackey@maine.gov, or reach out to Matt Pines at Maine Teen Camp for more info. ■



[Click here to read the letter from the Maine DoE](#)



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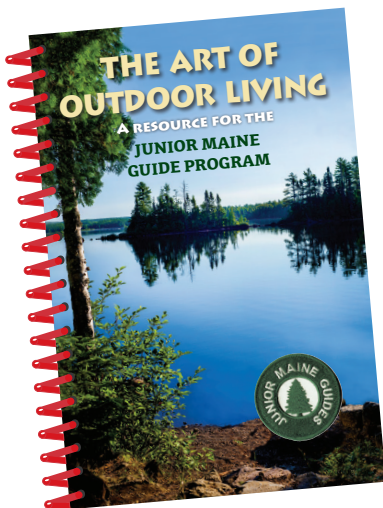
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The seventh edition to the *Art of Outdoor Living* is now at the printer. For those who pre-ordered copies, they will be available in about 2 weeks.

Anyone else who wants to purchase copies should contact [office@mainecamps.org](mailto:office@mainecamps.org). The cost of the book is \$34, except for those who preordered copies. They will be billed at \$27 a copy.

Special thanks to Moose Curtis, Kris Millard, and Bill and Linda Lundborg of Tides Edge Design for the many hours they spent on this project.

## Community Connections Group Update and May 6 Event

The Community Connections Group spent the winter doing some volunteering with WinterKids to help them prepare for their Winter Games and Downhill24 events. WinterKids reaches over 10,000 Maine school children and we helped in their office by preparing swag bags and participant supplies.

We invite you to join the Community Connections Group on Friday, May 6 at 2pm for a dog walk around Maine Teen Camp in Porter. Connect with peers and pooches in person and enjoy a break from your desk (dog ownership not required to attend)! Please consider how your dog gets along with others and be prepared to pick up after them if you plan to bring them along.

We will meet at Maine Teen Camp (481 Brownfield Road, Porter ME). As you turn into the drive, continue straight and up the hill until you're in our upper parking lot (if you see a bear, you're in the right spot). There is parking at the top of the drive and in front of the soccer field. Please avoid parking on the grassed areas.

Contact Nicky Martin at [nicky@teencamp.com](mailto:nicky@teencamp.com) to let us know if you plan to attend or call/text at 484-431-4473 if you have any questions.



## MYCA Update

April 5, 2022

With the busy legislative session in Augusta this winter, the MYCA Board kept track of several pending bills which could ultimately affect camps ranging from Paid Family & Medical Leave, Sunday Hunting, Tax Expenditures, Salaried Employees Exemptions and more. There was even an interesting series of emails amongst MYCA members to fully understand the technical difference of waste definitions “septage”, “sludge” and “effluent” (the fun never ends on the MYCA Board).

Regulations and new laws affecting camps are summarized regularly in the Hall Monitor and/or the “Legislative Report” from our membership meeting on March 30, so please refer back for details of the most important regulatory/policy issues of the past few months:

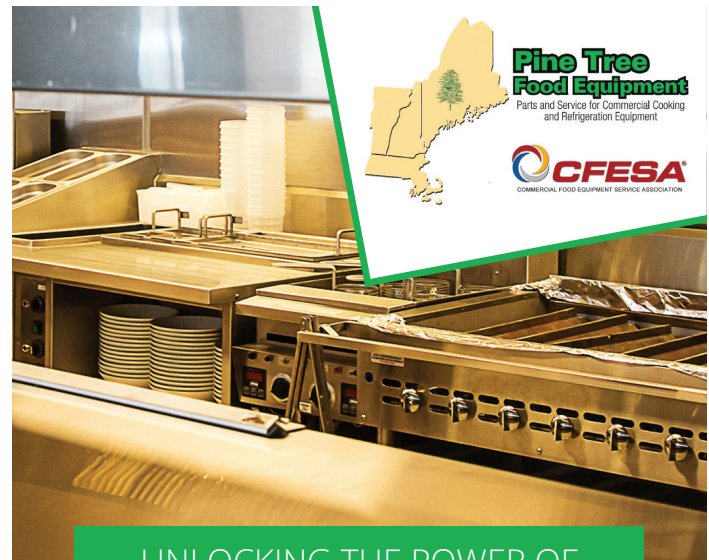
- ▶ IF&W commissioner rule affecting non-motorized sailboat and canoe races
- ▶ LD 1663 An Act to Improve Boating Safety
- ▶ DHHS announcement of limited inspection waivers for health inspections summer 2022
- ▶ MYCA’s public comment of support for several proposed bills that give indigenous peoples of Maine more access to federal recognition, funding and sovereignty.

As a member of MSC you should always contact Ron, myself, or a member of the MYCA Board if you have further questions.

I would like to thank Tom Doherty, most recently Executive Director of Ketcha Outdoors, for the many years he has been secretary and member of the MYCA Board. He has brought critical insight about non-profit camps to the table, along with a great sense of humor. We will miss Tom and his ability to be present at a Zoom meeting while simultaneously overseeing a lightning drill with his campers and staff. All the best to our colleague Tom as he moves on to new professional adventures.

May 1 will mark the end of an era for MSC & MYCA with Jack Erler’s retirement. Forty years of Jack working with Maine’s youth summer camps has brought our organizations to an advanced level of engagement with legislation and policy. The Maine camp industry is admired across the nation for the structure Jack has helped create, balancing the education of our members with detailed review and descriptions of rules and regulations which affect camps. We have such gratitude for all Jack has brought to our industry. His decades of work has truly made a difference in the summer experiences of campers, staff and directors of Maine. We hope you can join us for a Maine Summer Camps celebration of Jack’s work on Saturday, June 4 at 12:30 pm at Wyonegonic Camps in Denmark (details about the event are on the cover).

Laura Ordway, Winona Camps



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# 1956: Why You Should Send Your Child To A Maine Summer Camp – Part III

By Henry Paul Johnson, Maine Summer Camp Historian

In my last article, I further examined a 1956 publication titled, “The Maine Camp for Boys and Girls”, which outlined multiple reasons for why you should send your child to a Maine Summer Camp. This article tallies up those Boys camps that, according to the publication, existed within the State of Maine.

In 1956, there were ninety-two (92) Boys’ Summer Camps. For all of you Maine Camp enthusiasts, this article provides to you

a comprehensive list of those camps, which existed in 1956. As I suggested in my last article relating to Maine Girls’ Summer Camps, please challenge yourself by comparing this list to the summer camps, which you know exist today within the State of Maine. I would note that while some of the camps remain under the same directorship, camp name and at the same location, others no longer exist or have changed their directorship, camp name and/or location. ■

***Editor’s Note:** This article is written by noted author and Maine Summer Camp Historian, Henry Johnson who attended Camp Powhatan in Otisfield, Maine from 1966 through 1973 as a camper, counselor, and ultimately, program director. Mr. Johnson is the author of numerous articles and publications relating to the history of Maine summer camps. If you wish to submit information relating to the history of any Maine summer camp you may do so at: [hjohnson@henryjohnsonlaw.com](mailto:hjohnson@henryjohnsonlaw.com)*

## Boys’ Summer Camps existing in 1956

Name of Camp	Location	Name of Camp	Location	Name of Camp	Location
1. Adahi	Crawford Pond	32. Gregory	Crystal Lake	64. Pukwudjies	Lyman
2. Agassiz Village	Lake Thompson	33. Hawthorne	Panther Pond	65. Ranger Lodge	Brandy Pond
3. Agawam	Crescent Lake	34. Ha-Wa-Ya	Crystal Lake	66. Robin Hood	Lake Winnewaugh
4. Allagash	Moosehead Lake	35. Highfields	Alford Lake	67. Roosevelt	Little Fritz Pond
5. Androscoggin	Lake Androscoggin	36. William Hinds	Panther Pond	68. Ropioa	Long Lake
6. Androscoggin, Jr.	Lake Androscoggin	37. Husky	Mousam Lake	69. Royal Ambassador	Seashore
7. Arcadia	The Belgrade Lakes	38. Indian Acres	Saco River	70. Sassanoa	Georgetown
8. Arundel	Little Sebego Lake	39. Jordan	Branch Lake	71. Sebago	Sebago Lake
9. Beech Cliff	Mount Desert	40. Katahdin	Etna Pond	72. Skylemar	Tricky Lake
10. Belbern	China Lake	41. Katahdin	Stearns Lake	73. Songo	Pleasant Lake
11. Belgrade	Great Pond	42. Kawanhee	Lake Webb	74. Sparta	Orland
12. Berwick	Millbridge	43. Kennebec Camps	Salmon Lake	75. Spruce Ledge	Jessie Pond
13. Birch Rock	Lake McWain	44. Kieve	Nobleboro	76. State Y.M.C.A.	Lake
14. Biscay	Biscay Lake	45. Kingsley	Crescent Lake		Cobbosseecontee
15. Bomazeen	Great Pond	46. Koda	Long Lake	77. Tacoma Pines	Litchefield
16. Boothbay	Kennebec River	47. Kohut	Lake Thompson	78. Takajo	Sebago Lake
17. Boyland	Long Lake	48. Long Lake Lodge	Long Lake	79. Tall Timbers	Pleasant Lake
18. Brunonia	Pleasant Lake	49. Manitou	East Pond	80. Tekakwitha	Lake Androscoggin
19. Buckskin	Lake Donnell	50. Maranacook	Lake Maranacook	81. Timanous	Panther Pond
20. Caribou	Pattees Pond	51. Medomak Camps	Medomak Lake	82. Trout Lake Camp	Trout Lake
21. Cedar	Casco	52. Menatoma	Readfield	83. Waganaki	McWain Pond
22. Chewonki	Montsweag Bay	53. Mendota	Casco	84. Wasookeag School Camp	Lake Wasookeag
23. Chickawah	Island Lake	54. Mitigwa	Dodge Pond	85. Wavus	Damariscotta
24. Cobbossee	Lake	55. Modin	Lake George	86. Wekeela	Bear Lake
	Cobbosseecontee	56. Norshoco	Alfred	87. West End Home Camp	Long Pond
25. Dr. Johnson’s Camps	Crescent Lake	57. Nutter	Acton	88. Wigwam	Bear Lake
26. Dry-Kye	Ellsworth	58. O-At-Ka	Sebago Lake	89. Wildwood	Bridgton
27. Ettowah	Kimball Lake	59. Passaconaway	McWain Pond	90. Winnebago	Echo Lake
28. Flying Moose Lodge	Craig Pond	60. Pinehurst	Crescent Lake	91. Winona	Moose Pond
29. Frye’s Leap	Sebago Lake	61. Pine Island Camp	Great Pond	92. Zakelo	Long Lake
30. Great East Lodge	Great East Lake	62. Pokomoke	Sebago Lake		
31. Great Oaks	Saturday Pond	63. Powhatan	Pleasant Lake		

## 2022-23 Camp Membership Notification

For the first time in 3 years MSC is raising its dues. In most cases the increase will be about 5%. Dues this coming year need to be paid by August 1, unless you select the four-payment plan.



[Click here for the membership renewal form](#)

## Welcome New Business

### Cornish Inn

Built in 1820, The Cornish Inn is a historic 16-room inn located in Cornish, halfway between Portland and North Conway in Maine's lakes and mountains region. The inn is conveniently located to many western Maine summer camps. We offer a full onsite restaurant for breakfast and lunch, and host events throughout the year. The town of Cornish offers many activities such as shopping, dining, hiking and swimming, and more!

Molly Griffin McKenna, 207.712.5834  
innkeeper@cornishinn.com

## Webinar: COVID-19 Guidance from Dr. Laura Blaisdell

Wednesday May 4, 11am-12pm

Join us for a COVID-19 update from Dr. Laura Blaisdell on Wednesday May 4, 11am-12pm.

Dr. Blaisdell will provide details of the current state of the pandemic and share guidance on how to approach decision-making regarding mitigation strategies for the 2022 season.

For those who are unable to attend the webinar we will be recording it and will publish the link in the May 5 Hall Monitor.



[Click here to register for the May 4 COVID-19 Webinar](#)



This webinar is sponsored by Chalmers Insurance Group and Redwoods Group.

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## MSC Joins Maine Tourism Career Center Initiative

**M**aine Summer Camps members now have the chance to promote their job openings to thousands of potential candidates both within and outside Maine.

MSC, along with six other tourism-related associations, currently comprise the Maine Career Coalition. The job site initiative, spearheaded by the Maine Tourism Association, is known as the Maine Tourism Career Center. It was launched on March 22 and offers members of the coalition the opportunity to advertise job listings for both full-time and seasonal positions. Job seekers may also post resumes, search for job opportunities, connect with employers and receive weekly job alerts, according to a Maine Tourism Association press release.

***For camps who utilize the Maine Summer Camp job posting site, it's a win-win.***

Maine Tourism Association Director of Workforce Development Kathryn Ference calls the career center “a one-stop hub” for Maine tourism industry positions.

The coalition currently includes MSC, the Maine Tourism Association, Hospitality Maine, Maine Golf, the Retail Association of Maine, the Maine Campground Owners Association and Ski Maine. That group is likely to expand, Ference said.

“The initiative isn’t going to solve the workforce problem in Maine, but I really want it to make a dent,” Ference said. “We are very excited about the response, excited that people are using it.”

And her measure of success? When employers and applicants connect and hiring happens.

“I’m both excited and nervous,” Ference said. “I’m really pleased to see it starting to take off. We hope to keep that momentum.”

For camps who utilize the MSC job posting site, it’s a win-win. Because the coalition uses the same software as the MSC’s job board, all MSC postings will be pulled into the larger Maine Tourism Career Center platform.

MSC Executive Director Ron Hall is enthusiastic about the project. “I am very excited for Maine Summer Camps to be partnering with the Maine Tourism Association in their effort to help Maine hospitality industries with their search for finding employees.” Since the program kicked off on March 22 there has been a huge increase in the number of prospective employees viewing our camp listings.

Ference said that in approximately the first 10 days of the initiative the new site – which includes MSC job listings – had seen more than 14,000 job views, about 220,000 social media views, and that as part of its greater network, Maine Tourism

Career Center listings had been exposed to almost 400,000 individuals. In contrast, the week prior to the launch MSC’s job posting site had 3,337 job exposures and 220 job views. Ron Hall encourages camps to join MSC’s job search platform – \$75 per year for nonprofit camps, \$100 for other camps. Camps can also use the Maine Tourism site (found at [www.maintourismjobs.com](http://www.maintourismjobs.com)) at a cost of \$25 per listing.

Camps interesting in participating in the MSC job posting site can contact Sue in the MSC office. ■



## Behavior Management Essentials for 1st and 2nd Year Staff

Workshop with Chris Thurber, Ph.D.

**R**egister your staff for MSC’s *best ever summer seminar* presented by esteemed educator and camp and youth professional Chris Thurber, Ph.D. Your staff will strengthen their core leadership skills and connect with other staff while learning: (1) Practical strategies to bond with campers; (2) Collaborative ways to resolve conflicts; (3) Effective methods for helping with homesickness; and (4) Prosocial responses to bullying behavior. After practicing this four-pack of behavior management essentials with new friends from other camps, your staff will leave with the confidence and stamina they need to enjoy the rest of the season. As a bonus, they’ll also get tips on self-care and guidance for writing camp jobs on their resume—two sets of professional skills they can use long after closing day.

**Cost:** \$20 per participant

**When:** Tuesday, July 12 – 1:30 to 4:00 pm

**Where:** The workshop will be live, outdoors, under a covered pavilion at Camp Wawenock, 33 Wawenock Rd., Raymond, ME

**COVID Protocols:** Details will be confirmed in July. All participants must have proof of optimal vaccination for COVID



***Click here to register your staff for this workshop***

# Level Ground Initiative Going Strong, Aiming to Grow

## Initiative Poised to Thrive in Summer 2022

**D**ozens of campers from the immigrant and refugee community will once again attend MSC camps thanks to those camps' participation in the Level Ground initiative.

The program's mission is to provide summer youth camp opportunities, free of charge, to immigrant and refugee children for whom such experiences would otherwise be unavailable. Level Ground had a robust season in 2019 and then, like so many camp programs, was hobbled by the COVID-19 pandemic. The initiative was postponed in 2020 and resumed last summer with about a half dozen camps hosting youngsters.

Now the initiative is poised to thrive in summer 2022 and Level Ground committee members look forward to growth and expansion going forward. It's an initiative they are passionate about. It also follows the extensive and similar work that camps throughout the state have already done and continue to invest in.

"A lot of camps are doing great things besides immigrant and refugee campers," said Mike Douglass, director of Camp Bishopswood and chair of the Level Ground committee. Level Ground, which Douglass calls "one of my favorite initiatives we've done with getting kids to camp," can build on those efforts, he said.

"Camp provides the opportunity to show that skin may be a different color, but they all just youth here in Maine, looking to have fun," he said.

Camp Bishopswood donates upwards of 30 camper weeks to Level Ground youngsters. In 2022, 28 camper weeks will go to returning campers. Two returning youngsters will serve as CITs, Douglass said.

***As Level Ground committee chair, (Mike) Douglass has high hopes for the program's growth among Maine camps and potential partner organizations. "The sky is the limit."***

It's an honor to help make the camp experiences happen, he says. "I joke around with friends, say that a lot of the time I just feel like Santa Claus."

As Level Ground committee chair, Douglass also has high hopes for the program's growth among Maine camps and potential partner organizations.

"The sky is the limit," he said. While the initiative has focused primarily on Portland-area youth, Douglass says other communities, such as the Lewiston-Auburn region, will also benefit from the program. "There are a lot more families we can reach and a lot more camps that can be enriched by this experience."

### Program has 'vast potential'

Another founding member of the Level Ground initiative, Camp Wawenock's Catriona Sangster, agrees that the program has vast potential for increasing the number of youngsters who attend Maine camps.

"It can go down a road of infinite possibilities," she said. "What I'm most excited about is that I'm engaging possibility."

Sangster says her excitement about Level Ground is tempered with the realistic boundaries of what the initiative can currently achieve. "We are certainly more limited until we can hire somebody to be a person who's a point person for MSC," she said.

Such a step will require funding. One commitment for financial support is coming from Ampion, a community solar organization that connects people to local solar farms, in an effort to both increase communities' sustainability as well support local economies. A business member of MSC, Ampion recently pledged to contribute \$500 to the Level Ground initiative for each camp that registers with Ampion to benefit from renewable energy credits by sharing community solar operations. The organization has pledged \$6,000 to date. Ampion will continue contributing to Level Ground for each camp that it registers until June 30. Level Ground also aims to see funding through grants.

A key to the program's success is that camps hosting Level Ground campers understand their commitment to the program's participants, Sangster said. That includes identifying Level Ground campers' unique needs and considering the question "What am I doing to prepare to have [Level Ground] campers."

The end goal is that every camp is completely diverse, she said. "We have to create a culture of lots of different people being interested in camp." The first steps toward that goal are introducing more people to camp – "so more diverse families learn to love and appreciate camp."

### Plans to broaden Level Ground's reach

Following the 2022 camp season, Level Ground organizers plan to host a gathering at Portland Community Squash, one of the initiatives current partners, where interested camp leaders can learn more about the program. The committee also may hold a broader-ranging Zoom session to provide camps and potential partners with more information about the initiative.

MSC and the Level Ground committee are poised to increase the breadth of the program by enlisting more community and camp partners as well as extending the geographical scope of participating campers. "I feel happy that it survived COVID," said Sangster. "It had to take a back burner and now it's come to the front burner again." ■