

JMG Testers: Friendly Faces and Experts in Outdoor Living Skills

Examiner Katie Curtis has 13 years of guiding future stewards of Maine's outdoors



Photo: Caitlin Southwick

When she comes to Oquossoc in July, Katie Curtis will be in her element. Surrounded by eager JMG candidates and talented and collegial examiners, in the beauty of nature at the Stephen Phillips Memorial Preserve, she will again have the opportunity to experience her favorite parts of test encampment.

Every July, Maine campers arriving at the Junior Maine Guide test encampment are greeted by a dozen or more JMG Examiners, all of whom are friendly faces and true experts in outdoor living skills. For the past 13 summers, **Katie Curtis** has served as one of those examiners, imparting encouragement, knowledge, and a commitment to guiding future stewards of Maine's outdoors. And for a portion of the week of July 21-25, she will be at the Stephen Phillips Memorial Preserve again.

Curtis, who became a JMG through Hebron Academy in 1998 and Maine Guide in 2018, is clear about what draws her to the JMG program.

"I really like seeing the growth in kids, their confidence in sharing things that they know and helping them become leaders," Curtis said.

That growth can come between the first and second year of JMG candidacy, over a week of test encampment, even over the course of a test, she says. For example, a candidate engaged in the

canoeing examination can begin the test "super nervous," then begin a conversation and relax. "You say 'you know your stuff, keep going, you can do this,'" Curtis said.

As important as the outdoor living skills gained through JMG are the program's development of other abilities, she says. While someone may be able to "physically split a piece of wood," there are other essential elements to becoming a leader, she said.

"If you know the skills and you have the leadership that goes along with it, it helps you be a good promoter of conservation," Curtis said. "If you understand and appreciate the beauty in it, you know why you want to protect it."

Curtis is also a Maine Guide, a distinction she earned in 2018. That study process included drawing on her own trip leading

Examiner Katie Curtis continues on page 4

In-Person Gatherings in April Offered Education, Connection and Conversation

Dozens of MSC members came together in April for two in-person programs that offered the chance to connect, learn, and share. The Nonprofit Circle met at Camp Mechuwana on April 10, while the DEI Committee hosted a program on supporting trans and nonbinary campers and staff on April 30.

Nonprofit Circle Camp Pro's Meet at Camp Mechuwana

After meeting on Zoom since last summer, almost 20 members of MSC's Nonprofit Circle — representing short-session, small, nonprofit camps — once again gathered in person at Camp Mechuwana in April. It was a morning of connection and questions, sharing and socializing, followed by a soup and salad lunch courtesy of Camp Mechuwana.

"Being able to meet in person is important especially after meeting by Zoom all year," said Norm Thombs, Camp

In-Person Gatherings continues on page 6

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Published by **Maine Summer Camps**
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MESSAGE FROM THE MSC PRESIDENT

JUNE 2025

It's the moment everyone has been waiting for! My last President's letter. Being Board President for MSC has been an incredible honor and provided a deep insight into our remarkable industry, but I join you all in being profoundly relieved that the amazing Terri Mulks will be taking over soon.



As this is my last President's letter, I want to leave with the question, and a possible answer, that has been taking up a lot of space in my brain over the last couple of years.

In the early 2000's researchers identified a U-shaped curve of happiness. Kids and young people tended to be quite happy, those in middle age much less so, and older folks showed high levels of happiness and life satisfaction. Plotting happiness on the Y axis, and age on the X, revealed a U Shape that was consistent since at least the 1970's, and showed up around the world.

In 2025, however, it appears that the U shape has collapsed. Young people are no longer as happy as their grandparents' generation. At best they are doing about as well as their parents' generation, if not worse. This trend started before the pandemic, which made it worse, and it has shown no signs of recovery since.

The causes of the collapse are likely multiple. Arguably the largest cause is a loss of social connection. This alone may not account for the entire collapse, but given that social connection serves as a buffer against so many other threats to happiness, its loss compounds other ills. Connection is crucial.

One of the leading researchers documenting the collapse of the U curve is Danny Blanchflower at Dartmouth College in NH. Dr. Blanchflower has recently shifted focus. He knows what is occurring, he's been collecting that data for years now. So he's no longer asking what is happening. The question now is "what are we going to do about it?"

I think that we in camping know the answer to that question. We answer it every day of every summer. Because at its essence, helping young people build connections is what camp does.

As we head into this summer and beyond, please keep answering the question over and over. Keep doing all those things that camps have done for decades that are proven to build and maintain connections, building happier kids. And after the summer, don't be afraid to speak up and let those outside of camping know about it. We really need to start reversing the trend lines soon.

Have a wonderfully safe, surprise free, not too rainy summer.

Matt Pines, MSC Board President, Maine Teen Camp Co-Director

MYCA UPDATE

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

On May 5, the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) released the final version of the **Chapter 208 Youth Camps Rule** (click the link below to access the rule).

This rule went into effect immediately and will be the rule used to **inspect** licensed youth camps. This rule is also the investigation basis of **referrals** forwarded from the Child Protective Intake Hotline to the Out of Home Investigations Team involving a licensed youth camp, and any **complaint** about a licensed youth camp submitted directly to the Health Inspector Program.



[Click here to access the DHHS Chapter 208 Youth Camps Rule](#)

For posterity, I'll summarize the process we have been through over these past five years:

- The last time the Youth Camps licensing rule had been amended was in 2007.
- In January 2020, DHHS asked MYCA, as a stakeholder, to comment on four questions regarding amendments to the rule (we did and also commented on additional parts of the 2007 rule) although no stakeholder meetings were convened during the pandemic.
- From January 2020 through December 2023, MYCA representatives regularly asked DHHS for updates on the stakeholder process but were given no further opportunities to comment on the Chapter 208 Youth Camps Rule.
- Therefore, it was a surprise on December 27, 2023, when DHHS released a proposed Chapter 208 rule with far more changes to the 2007 version than just the four questions from January 2020. MYCA had significant concerns with more than 50 of the proposed rules and created a Call to Action for MSC membership in January 2024.
- Despite a great response from our membership during the public hearing and comment period, closing on January 28, 2024, DHHS would not withdraw the rule. MYCA and government affairs attorney, Newell Augur, decided upon the unusual step to create a legislative resolve, sponsored by Senators Brenner and Bennett to, "Require a Stakeholder Group to Participate in the Development of Rules Regarding Youth Camps". LD 2230 emergency resolve passed unanimously in the 131st Legislature Second Regular session on April 9. DHHS complied with the resolve on April 24 and withdrew the proposed rule to begin the stakeholder meeting process.
- Members of the MYCA and MSC boards participated in three stakeholder meetings (two meetings in Augusta, one virtual meeting) from September through December 2024, with multiple

exchanges of the proposed rule (comments and feedback) in between meetings. While MYCA had hoped for one more stakeholder meeting to discuss final concerns, we were informed in late December there would be no further meetings, and the formal rulemaking process would begin again

- On February 19, 2025, DHHS released the final draft of the rule with the final version of the rule published on May 5. MYCA submitted comments on the final draft in February. MYCA and MSC stakeholder working group did not oppose the final rule; after more than five years of work we feel it is the best version of the rule we are going to get from the Department at this time. This may be little comfort to those camps which have significant steps to take for 2025 compliance (e.g., top bunkbed railings, number of showers, staff background checks) in which case MYCA encourages you to apply for a variance.
- For variance information and a summary of noteworthy changes to the Chapter 208 Youth Camps Rule, be sure to watch the MYCA hosted Q&A meeting from May 14 (contact MSC ED Lucy for the recording link).

Please note: On May 8th Lucy Norvell, Newell Augur and I attended the annual pre-season MYCA-DHHS/HIP department meeting in Augusta. The manager of the HIP program reiterated what she had stated previously in stakeholder meetings, "Serious violations will be cited, but 2025 is an educational summer for both youth camps and the HIP inspectors with this new rule."

Laura Ordway
President MYCA Board
Winona Camps
laura@winonacamps.com

MYCA (Maine Youth Camp Association) is an affiliated organization to Maine Summer Camps (MSC). MYCA's mission is to monitor, publicly comment and interpret state and federal legislation on behalf of MSC, with the purpose of furthering the welfare of camps in Maine. We maintain relationships with agencies and policy officials for camp advocacy. Additionally, our 501(c)(4) non-profit status allows for limited activities supporting political campaigns. As a member of MSC, your camp is also a member of MYCA. If applicable, any LDs and laws in rulemaking outlined above have been more thoroughly explained in a Legislative Report which is sent to MSC members prior to the annual and semi-annual membership meetings, or in the MYCA Moment section of The Hall Monitor.

Katie Curtis *continued from page 1*

experience as well as seeking advice from other Maine Guides. “Ginny Geyer (also a JMG Examiner) helped a lot,” she said. “She has a bunch of study guides; I studied a lot with her.”

Curtis is honest about the Maine Guide examination. “I didn’t feel good about the way it was administered,” she said. “The sexism that so many people had talked about I really experienced,” she said.

The daughter of Moose Curtis, JMG Director for five decades, Katie Curtis grew up learning outdoor living skills. “When I was really little, I’d go out to Swan Island for [testing encampment] set-up days. I’d meet the testers and hang out on Swan Island.”

After earning her undergraduate degree from Colby College in geology, and a master’s in earth science from Dartmouth, Curtis began a dozen-year teaching career at Falmouth Academy on Cape Cod, The Dublin School in New Hampshire, and most recently the Maine Coast Semester of the Chewonki Foundation.

Her most recent career transition has taken her to the current role of a geomorphologist for an engineering firm. A member of a water resources group, her work involves bridge designs and “how water interacts with the structure at different flow levels.”

“I really like the collaboration of the team,” she said. “It’s all remote and we just got to be together for a training. That was really exciting, to see different people in the field.” This summer, Curtis will be involved with evaluating 24 bridges across Maine in a project for the Maine Department of Transportation. As a result, she will be able to only spend a day or two at the five-day JMG test encampment in July at the Stephen Phillips Memorial Preserve in Oquossoc.

Curtis says JMG candidates face different challenges in preparing for the certification exam from campers of her generation, particularly regarding skills practice.

“I think that JMG used to be immersed in tripping,” she said. “Right now, camps seem to have outdoor living skills and tripping. A lot of trip counselors are excellent outdoors people, but they aren’t always giving the kids leadership and responsibility as guides.”

Curtis says that her outdoor living skills were developed by “doing as much as the adults” they were with. “Nowadays campers have less opportunity to practice the skills.” One skill that is particularly empowering is splitting wood, she says. “It’s not how you’re physically built, it’s do you have the technique?” she said.

When she comes to Oquossoc in July, Curtis will be in her element. Surrounded by eager JMG candidates and talented and collegial examiners, in the beauty of nature at the Stephen Phillips Memorial Preserve, she will again have the opportunity to experience her favorite parts of test encampment. “I really enjoy mealtimes, hearing stories and journeys of how they got involved, what they want to do for future aspirations,” she said. “Young people have a lot of good ideas.”

Katie Curtis and the other JMG staff will be listening. ■



Camp Tapawingo Spelling Bee team in 2023

Attention Spellers and Chess Players!

The annual MSC Spelling Bee has a New Location

Bring your campers to Camp Wigwam on Tuesday, July 15 from 9:30 a.m. to noon for the annual MSC Spelling Bee. Founded by Bob Strauss of Camp Wigwam, the bee is now in the hands of Strauss’s successor Neal Goldberg. Camp Wigwam will host the event and **NOTE!** It’s on a Tuesday to avoid conflicts with camps’ traditional trip days. Watch the Hall Monitor for more details.

West End House Camp to Host MSC Annual Chess Tournament

Chess players of all ages will compete at the annual MSC Chess Tournament at West End House Camp on Thursday, July 24 from 9:30 a.m. to noon. Watch the Hall Monitor for more information. ■

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Ampion to Once Again Provide Financial Support to MSC

Company will seek to enroll more camps in community solar programs

Ampion, founded in Bar Harbor in 2014, began its involvement with Maine's Community Energy Program in 2019. Now a Boston-based renewable energy company, Ampion has once again committed to providing financial support to MSC through the enrollment of camps in their community solar program.

In 2022, 13 camps registered with the company's community solar program, resulting in a more than \$4200 contribution to the MSC Level Ground Initiative.

Ampion Sales Executive Ely Spencer says that this year Ampion will be able to raise the level of its contribution to MSC by contributing a penny per kW hour used by newly registered camps. "If we were to enroll a similar number of camps [as in 2022], it would come out to a larger contribution to MSC this year," he said.

"The funds will benefit our 501(c)(3) organization," said MSC Executive Director Lucy Norvell. "With rising electricity costs this summer, this is an environmentally responsible business solution that will save camps money AND benefit MSC."

"We continue to see MSC as a great partner and summer camps in general are groups that could benefit from community solar subscriptions," Spencer said. Community solar participation is straightforward, he said. "We take a look at usage on the electric accounts for a camp and assign them to a share of a local solar project to match that usage. Nothing changes with how they receive their electricity." The only difference is that on the monthly bill from CMP or Versant, the camp receives credits reducing what they owe, he explained.

Spencer said the final piece of the arrangement is that Ampion invoices the camp for the kW hours produced on their behalf — at a rate 15 percent less than what the camp would have otherwise paid.

"It's a great fit for businesses that for one reason or another don't want to do solar on site. Maybe there's not a good roof location, or they can't afford it," he said. "The way Maine has set it up, there are guaranteed savings."

Working with MSC camps "is a good fit," said Spencer. After enrolling more than a dozen camps in its campaign three years ago, Ampion sees "now as a great time to do some more outreach and education around community solar," he said. ■

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Terri Mulks, Camp Susan Curtis, and Carol Dorr and Norm Thombs, Camp Mechuwana, at the Nonprofit Circle gathering in April.

Mechuwana's executive director and co-chair of the Nonprofit Circle. "The ability to share with each other formally and informally has tremendous value. Our hope is that we can create an atmosphere where everyone can share freely about anything they want. It was amazing to witness this type of sharing and support," he said.

The conversation among participants covered a wide range of topics, including the impact of the Chapter 208 Youth Camps Rule. MSC Executive Director Lucy Norvell explained that although the rule was in the rulemaking process at the time of the Mechuwana gathering, camps would be expected to comply with their requirements during the summer of 2025. The rule was adopted on May 5, 2025.

Norvell also said that Health Inspection Program inspectors, who visit camps to evaluate rule compliance, will once again participate in an MSC training in June, meeting with content specialists at several MSC camps. The areas covered will include high ropes, waterfront, health centers, target sports, equestrian and trip and travel.

Camp professionals had a variety of questions and concerns, and the gathering allowed them to offer and solicit information and support in a more personal way than Zoom could offer. Topics such as background checks, ICE's potential impact at camp, staff safety, travel visas, and available resources were all part of the conversation.

"Almost all of us have incredibly small staffs," Thombs said. "Many nonprofits have no support staff until summer or just before summer. Because of this it's easy for nonprofits to feel very isolated and alone. This group helps with that isolation," he said.

"The in-person connection is important," said Camp Susan Curtis Director Terri Mulks, who co-chairs the Nonprofit Circle with Thombs. Coming together in person allows camp professionals "to feel like they have support, and they aren't navigating a difficult world alone," she said. "I love seeing people and hearing what is happening and just being able to hang out."

DEI Program on Supporting Trans and Nonbinary Campers and Staff Held at the Center for Grieving Children

"We're here to love our staff and love our campers."

Ajay Henry-Hill, staff director at Maine Teen Camp, put it simply. In welcoming more than two dozen Maine camp professionals to the DEI Committee's first in-person program, Henry-Hill kicked off a morning-long event focused on supporting trans and nonbinary campers and staff.

The three-hour gathering, held at the Center for Grieving Children in Portland, brought together nearly 40 camp professionals, two experts, a three-person panel, and offered three breakout rooms.

The program was Henry-Hill's brainchild, and a collaborative effort of MSC's DEI Committee, designed to answer a simple question: "What can we do as summer camps to make it a little bit easier on those who fall outside the gender binary?" Held the morning of April 30, "it went so well, better than I thought it could ever go, hugely thanks to the DEI Committee," Henry-Hill said.



DEI Committee members Macy Galvan, Evelyn Kirby, Cara Bergantino, Katie Goodman, Peter Kassen, Ajay Henry-Hill, along with MSC Executive Director Lucy Norvell. Missing is committee member Thea Hollman

Structured in three parts, it began with the presentations of two experts, Cassie Cooper of OUTMaine and Nick Teich of Fairwinds Consulting, who each gave 20-minute talks with "specific content most relevant to our members," said DEI Committee Co-Chair Katie Goodman. Their presentations were followed by a panel discussion addressing such issues as gender expansive housing, helping campers who lack support at home, and reminders about what camp is intended to be — fun and safe — for all campers.

In-Person Gatherings continues on page 7

In-Person Gatherings *continued from page 6*

Following the panel, participants had the choice of three breakout rooms for conversations on more specific topics related to the day's theme. Katie Goodman addressed single-sex camps and the issues they may face, Teich discussed "Inclusion 101," and Cooper offered guidance in "Unconscious Bias."

"We got a lot of information out there," said DEI Committee Co-Chair Peter Kassen. "We gave people the opportunity to exchange ideas, and I think we also set a good tone, not just to transmit information but create a welcoming space, a kind of accepting space, and model that in a way."

"We were thrilled to have a full turnout for the event and to see the camping community in Maine dedicated to ensuring the safety of the trans and nonbinary campers and staff of our community."

Post-program survey results were positive as well. Participants complimented the presenters and expressed appreciation for the breakout rooms, which offered the chance to hear different perspectives. Several respondents said they gained promising ideas for upcoming staff trainings. In addition, camp

professionals said that considering the topic, the program could easily have been longer than three hours.

Kassen praised the presenters as well as the DEI Committee members. "As you approach the issue it feels very complicated," he said. "The presenters did a really good job of taking us through things step-by-step that sort of simplified it — made it accessible, made it doable."

"It's an incredible committee because it consists of only one board member," Kassen said. "Everybody stepped up and worked really well together."

"We were thrilled to have a full turnout for the event and to see the camping community in Maine dedicated to ensuring the safety of the trans and nonbinary campers and staff of our community," said Goodman. "I feel very grateful to be in a professional community with such committed, caring and thoughtful people." ■



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Rene Cote, Kingsley Pines, and Paddy Fuller, Fernwood Cove, at the fall 2024 Migis Meetup

Sept. 25 is Migis Meetup Day!

Once again, MSC members will be hosted by Migis Lodge in Casco for its annual Migis Meetup. More details will be forthcoming but here's what we can tell you now.

A maximum of 100 MSC camp members can attend. The program has no cost; it's a benefit of MSC membership! When registration opens in August, we will allow camps to register two people and put others on a wait list to attend if registration doesn't fill with reps from other MSC Camps.

The day will begin at 8:15 a.m. with coffee and conversation. The program will begin at 9 a.m. sharp.

As in the last few years, we will offer breakout groups on a variety of topics to help debrief the summer and inform future educational offerings.

The Gourmet Migis Lunch will begin at 12:15 p.m. and the MSC Board will meet at 1 p.m.



Thank You to Our Junior Maine Guide Program Supporters

It takes more than a village to prepare for and host the JMG encampment in July each summer. We have many people to thank in advance of this summer's testing encampment, which will unfold in Oquossoc during the week of July 21-25. Major funders of the JMG program are the **Maine Timberlands Charitable Trust (MTCT)** and the **Enterprise Mobility Foundation**. L. L. Bean has provided in-kind donations of compasses for the candidates over the course of many years. Thirty thousand dollars of MTCT funding provides scholarships for candidates who otherwise would not be able to benefit from a camp experience or pursue a credential of this significance. And the growing support of the Enterprise Mobility Foundation, \$4,000, supplements the entire program's budget, from essentials like porta potty rentals, to general supplies, to speaker stipends for the amazing Maine professionals who deliver inspiring campfire talks during the evening.



Dedicated Leadership

MSC's JMG program benefits from the dedication of its leaders and faculty! Spencer Ordway of Winona Camps chairs the JMG Committee. Ron Fournier, Recreational Safety Supervisor, Maine Dept Inland Fisheries and Wildlife, directs the program with assistance from Lynn O'Donnell and Bill Southwick. In Summer 2025, JMG testers in addition to Ron, Lynn and Bill included: Katie Curtis, Virginia Geyer, Caitlyn Southwick, Haley Southwick, Marie Keane, K Bolduc, Lou Falank, Bruce McDonald, Pete St. John, Stephanie Emery, and Lindley Brainard. Dan O'Donnell provides all the logistical support, set up and take down muscle and knowledge, and culinary contributions!

JMG candidates and graduates often grow up and go on to become licensed Maine Guides or Game Wardens, among other professions that value their extensive JMG skill sets. JMG Testing Camp experiences are formative and contribute mightily to the future success of the young people who are lucky enough to participate in this program.

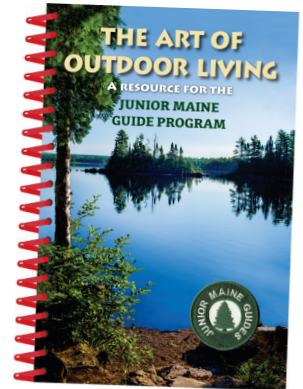
MSC's partnership with the Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife since 1937 has been an important part of the history of our organization and of the summer camp movement in Maine. We are excited for the coming summer's encampment in Oquossoc and for all the candidates who will attend.

The annual **JMG Rendezvous** for prospective candidates will be held on July 12 from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. at Camp O-AT-KA, Sebago. Check out the JMG Program!

Opportunities to Participate

If your camp offers programs that build outdoor living skills, please consider offering the precursor programs to JMG — Jr. Maine Woodcraft and Maine Woodcraft. Many MSC camps do — and earn the patches, too. Several MSC member camps offer the Woodcraft programs. We have some new camps involved in JMG with their sights on sending campers to the testing encampment some day. The JMG book, *The Art of Outdoor Living*, is an excellent resource and a great addition to your camp library.

If you think your camp would benefit from offering the Woodcraft programs or aspiring to JMG, please contact **Spencer Ordway** of Winona Camps, Chair of the JMG Committee. ■



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Member Dues Due by August, 30, 2025

MSC Member Dues will increase as modestly as possible in the fiscal year that begins on July 1, 2025. Business Membership will increase 5% from \$300 to \$315. Camp Members set their dues **based on their gross revenue in 2024**. Camp Dues are slated to rise by 4% as reflected by this chart.

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\$3M+ 2024 revenue = \$3822

INDIVIDUAL MEMBER DUES:

\$40 for retirees, those who have stepped down from a recent camp professional role, and individuals at from MSC Member Camps.

Executive Director Lucy Norvell said, “MSC is fortunate to have 140+ Camp Members and 150+ Business Members. New members are joining all the time and this strengthens us all! MSC strives to provide all our Camp Members with the highest level of education, advocacy, support, networking and resources. MSC Business Members help us to do this with many innovative and essential goods and services offered to camps. MSC strives to provide all Business Members with the best networking opportunities in person and equally effective ways to market to camps and camp professionals online and in print.” Please reach out to Lucy at camps@mainecamps.org to provide feedback, to share new ideas and suggestions, or to request or discuss something new!

Dues are due by August 30, 2025. Camps can request a payment plan if that is preferred. There are forms with many details for each Membership Type.



[Click here to pay MSC Camp Dues \(July 1, 2025-June 30, 2026\)](#)



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Mark your calendar!

2025 Upcoming Events

Tuesday, July 1

Early Skills for Peak Performance (for CITs and young staff)
with Chris Thurber, 10am-1pm, Camp Wawenock, Raymond

Saturday, July 12

JMG Rendezvous, 9 am - 2 pm, Camp O-AT-KA, Sebago

Tuesday, July 15

MSC Spelling Bee, 9:30am-12pm, Camp Wigwam, Harrison

Monday - Friday, July 21-25

Junior Maine Guide Testing Encampment, Stephen Phillips Memorial Preserve, Oquossoc

Thursday, July 24

Chess Tournament, 9:30am-12pm, West End Boys Camp, Parsonsfield

Wednesday, September 10

MYCA Virtual Board Meeting, 10 am-12 pm

Thursday, September 18

MYCA/MSC Virtual Annual Meeting, 11am-1pm

Thursday, September 25

Migis Meetup at Migis Lodge, South Casco, 9am-1pm,
8:15 am-Coffee, Lunch at 12:15 pm

Thursday, September 25

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Working at Camp, Working in Schools: Building Career Pathways

Educational technicians fill important roles at Maine's summer camps

“Science is my thing,” says Camp Beech Cliff nature program head Molly Stewart, describing their roles at Camp Beech Cliff and Tremont Consolidated School on Mt. Desert Island. Stewart, a third year ed tech in middle school science classes, is about to begin their fifth summer at Camp Beech Cliff.

Stewart is one of three Camp Beech Cliff staff members employed as an educational technician in the Mt. Desert Island school system during the academic year. Stewart says that after their first summer running the camp's nature program, they knew they “wanted to stay and do that year after year.” The logical choice? Working as an ed tech.

“I think you bring different aspects of working with kids to each job,” Stewart said. “I bring the way I am at camp to the school system, and my experience working with different types of students helped at camp.”

Matt Cornish, director of Camp Beech Cliff, has recommended staff members taking the ed tech route. “A lot of our staff finish school looking at the next step,” Cornish said. “They have a passion for working with youth and education — even if not a long-term goal, they step into ed tech roles.” Similarly, Cornish said, “we have had folks the other way around,” ed techs in the school system looking for summer positions.

The relationships cultivated in these situations are both beneficial, Cornish said. “We are lucky to partner with the MDI school system,” he said.

Ed techs coming to camp “are walking in with a level of youth development training that maybe not everyone is walking in with.”

Ed techs coming to camp “are walking in with a level of youth development training that maybe not everyone is walking in with,” he said. “There are things they already know; you don't have to hold their hand.”

“It's a great way that this community gets to have really awesome people stay in it — who care about the community and the children of the community,” he said.

When Emma Jones started working at a summer camp during college, she “fell in love with it.” Jones says she needed a summer job, “loved working with kids, and wanted to come back to MDI.” A former Camp Beech Cliff camper, Jones was a student at the University of Maine, Machias studying psychology and community studies. With four courses to go to earn her bachelor's degree, Jones is now considering becoming a teacher.

As an educational technician, Jones is finishing the school year at Mt. Desert Elementary School and preparing for another summer at Camp Beech Cliff, where like many camp staff, she will wear many hats.

“When I decided I wanted to stay year-round [Camp Director Matt Cornish] suggested I be an ed tech,” Jones said. “I took that leap I never thought I was going to do.” Jones says working at camp makes her a better ed tech and vice versa. “There are a lot of transferable skills,” she said, adding that she relied on her skills learned at camp when she first began working in a classroom. “I love both roles,” she said. “I think that working with kids was definitely what I needed to do.” In addition, Jones says being part of the year-round community is “awesome.”

Jones plans to finish her bachelor's degree in the coming school year through online study. Her coursework may include graduate level education classes in the second semester, she said.

Diana Doiron, workforce development specialist at Maine's Department of Education, says ed techs who work at camps have valuable skills that can count toward teaching certification. Doiron says she doesn't know whether ed techs who work at camps consider how their camp experience “gives them a wider berth of management skills.”

“You [camp] folks do a really nice job of helping your counselors and staff think about the human in front of them,” she said.

Working at Camp continues on page 11

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Doiron says she will continue her practice of visiting camps this summer to talk to staff members about how they can make a transition to becoming a Maine teacher. “A lot of times I’m just there to plant a seed,” she said.

Individuals with a bachelor’s degree, a concentration area, and certain credentials can earn a conditional teaching certificate, Doiron says. They then have three years to complete graduate level courses to gain full certification.

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Doiron says the University of Southern Maine received a grant from the Maine Department of Labor and the Maine Department of Education to develop educator apprenticeship programs. Those programs include on-the-job learning components which include the opportunity to earn some credits through skill competency demonstrations. This apprenticeship pathway in part includes an Ed. Tech. III-to-special education bachelor’s degree, she said.

Molly Stewart is one student who would ultimately like to be an educator. “I’m happy with what I’m doing now but eventually I’d like to get my master’s degree in environmental studies and outdoor education.”

“These two jobs have shifted that final goal of mine,” they said.

A third MDI ed tech and Camp Beech Cliff staff member, Ash Cray, graduated from the University of Maine Orono a year ago. An ed tech at Pemetec Elementary School on MDI, Cray first began working at Camp Beech Cliff in the summer of 2022. “I love being with kids all summer,” they said. Cray’s first summer at the camp, working as a lifeguard, introduced them to working with groups of campers, they said. “It led me to change my major to child development.”

And at Camp Beech Cliff, Cray uses their experience in their role as the camper support specialist. They describe the work as “kind of a guidance counselor” working with campers and families to ensure they receive the support they need.

“I love it,” Cray said. “It’s my favorite job I’ve ever had.” ■

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