



Bette Bussel
Jack Erler Award Recipient 2026

The Jack Erler Award recognizes outstanding contributions to organized camping, as exemplified by Jack Erler’s own long-time service to Maine Summer Camps. It is presented to individuals, groups, or organizations that may or may not be members of Maine Summer Camps to recognize exceptional support of Maine Summer Camps.

Described by a colleague as a visionary who was “always there to lend her counsel and support,” our award recipient was at the helm of ACA, New England for three decades. In her role as executive director, another colleague says, her support for presidents and executive board members was “extraordinary, with one single goal in mind – to help New England camps be their best – the best in the nation. She had an uncanny ability to hire the best staff, support the staff, and advocate for New England states with ACA National about relevant topics and issues.” The Maine youth camping industry was a prime beneficiary of this talent.

In addition to Camp Runoia’s Pam Cobb, who served as an ACA, New England Board President during Bette Bussel’s tenure, a Maine mother-son camp team were also board presidents during Bette’s years of service. Wyonegonic Camps’s Carol Sudduth conducted the search that brought Bette to the organization, while Steve Sudduth served as ACA, New England President as Bette’s service neared its end. Steve Sudduth recounts a quote he heard on several occasions describing Bette’s hiring in 1990.

“Okay, we think we found somebody. She’s from New Jersey and she’s a Yankees fan but we’ll deal with that. We think we can keep her for three to five years.”

Three to five years, indeed. And while she is well known for her New York Yankees alliance, that didn’t stop her from spearheading renowned fundraisers at Fenway Park.

A former Maine Summer Camps Executive Director says that the state of Maine, as a “more complex” place to operate a camp, continuously benefited from Bette’s “huge help.”

“Bette really was able to pivot into areas that were of the utmost concern to camps,” he says. “I was never able to say no to Bette. Her passion for the summer camp experience was contagious. Bette’s creativity, enthusiasm and knowledge made working with her enjoyable and rewarding.”

The consummate communicator, Bette was an exemplary conduit for expressing the needs and concerns of Maine’s camp professionals to ACA National. “She made sure that communication would happen,” says a former ACA, New England board president.

This camp professional says that one example of her skill and tenacity was found in the handling of a complex

federal camp transportation issue about a decade ago. Bette was instrumental in conveying to ACA National the challenges Maine camps faced because of a particular interpretation of a regulation, he says. “It was a big deal not just for Maine but across the country; states follow states.”

Bette also was willing and able to effectively bring Maine camp professionals into “her world,” a colleague says. “The real direct connection between volunteer leadership from Maine into New England leadership categories is Bette’s legacy.”

These qualities all came with a “twinkle in her eye,” this colleague continues. Not overpowering or dominating, Bette was able to listen and “then filter information and circle back” with a strategy and solution for addressing a particular situation.

For all her extraordinary leadership abilities, demonstrated through her commitment to youth camping and to Maine Summer Camps, the 2026 Jack Erler Award is presented to Bette Bussel.

Past Recipient of the Jack Erler Award

For outstanding contributions to organized camping

Jim Chalmers - 2025 Erler Award Recipient

This year's Jack Erler Award recipient – the third ever recipient of the award – is described by camp directors as knowledgeable, compassionate, empathetic, and generous. That this year's awardee is not a camp owner or director speaks volumes about his ability to support camps and, as one camp administrator says, serve as a “trusted counselor and advisor.”. Camp directors also praise the recipient's extraordinary generosity of time and experience.

His business has for years sponsored a broad range of MSC events, including educational workshops, webinars, and the Maine social gathering at the ACA, New England annual conference. These generous contributions are truly valuable to camp professionals, making “the camping industry a better industry – more safe and more effective for kids,” says one camp director.

For all these extraordinary qualities, and his outstanding service in support of organized youth camping in Maine, Maine Summer Camps presents the 2025 Jack Erler award to Chalmers Insurance Group Chief Sales Officer Jim Chalmers.

Kris Millard - 2023 Erler Award Recipient

This year's Jack Erler Award recipient – the second ever recipient of the award – embodies the best qualities of a colleague, team member and team player. She has exceptional talent and skill sets that co-workers, collaborators, MSC board and committee members, camp members, camp staff, campers, and families rely upon. And she has used them to provide exceptional support for Maine Summer Camps. She makes every effort to enable others to shine as she prefers to stay out of the spotlight. Yet, her voice has been prominently featured over the years as a primary voice of MSC, as she has featured camps, our organization, and the importance and impact of the camp experience in myriad ways.

For all these attributes, her unparalleled service as the Communications & Program Consultant for Maine Summer Camps, and her outstanding and longtime contributions to Maine's camping industry, the 2023 recipient of the Jack Erler Award is Kristine Snow Millard.

Laura Blaisdell, MD, MPH FAAP – 2021 Jack Erler Award Recipient

It is fitting that the inaugural recipient of the Jack Erler Award has demonstrated through vast expertise and passion a profound influence upon policies affecting Maine youth camps.

A pediatrician, public health expert, researcher, and camp medical director, the 2021 recipient of this award has effected change in childhood vaccine policy. She has made broad contributions both regionally and nationally on issues related to camps' communicable diseases policies. Since the COVID-19 pandemic began 18 months ago she has utilized her full range of medical, research, and communications expertise to guide camps, camping organizations, schools, and policy makers in implementing comprehensive and effective policy measures to keep children healthy and safe. The impact of these efforts has proven invaluable, particularly for the Maine camping industry to which she has longstanding personal and professional connections.

This year's Jack Erler Award recipient was instrumental in helping to ensure the broad childhood vaccination requirements through her work with Maine Public Law, Ch. 154 in 2019. She was well equipped through her nascent consulting practice to redirect her energies in 2020 to addressing camps' and organizations' needs for expert leadership on issues surrounding COVID-19. Since then, she was lead author of a national CDC MMWR study on camps' handling of the pandemic and has assisted both the American Camp Association, the Association of Camp Nurses, federal and state CDC personnel, Maine state officials, camps and public and private schools across the U.S. in managing COVID-19 responses and prevention and mitigation efforts.

The impact of her commitment and abilities has been vast. Like Jack Erler himself, this year's award winner has brought a combination of professional excellence, an understanding of camps' needs, and a spirit of true care for Maine youth camps' missions.

Maine Summer Camps cannot credit this recipient enough, for the successes Maine youth camps experienced these past two summers in implementing communicable disease plans to navigate the challenges of COVID-19.

Acknowledging her profound and positive influence on camps' pandemic landscape, Maine Summer Camps awards the 2021 Jack Erler Award to Laura Blaisdell, MD, MPH, FAAP.



The Jack Erler Award

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The award recipient will be chosen by the Maine Summer Camps Awards Committee. The award will be granted only upon determination of an appropriate candidate

Jack Erler's commitment to Maine youth camping has extended throughout his 50-year career as an attorney, collaborator, and advocate. His contributions date back decades, perhaps marked first by his invaluable role in 1974 in working with Maine's Department of Health and Human Services to draft the original youth camp rules. Since then, he has been instrumental in each substantive revision of those rules. For more than 35 years Jack represented camps in the breadth and depth of their operations, including issues related to children, employment, health and safety, regulatory compliance, organizational structure, land use, environmental issues, taxes, transactions, and transition planning. He has been a familiar face at hundreds of staff training sessions, offering vital education to support camps in operating safe, professional, compassionate programming.

His legislative and policy impact has also been vast, evidenced by a rich continuity of knowledge and decades of truly understanding Maine youth camps. A passionate advocate as well, Jack Erler's broad and expert influence has made Maine camps the industry leader throughout the U.S. This award represents Maine Summer Camps' heartfelt respect, admiration, and appreciation for Jack Erler's talent, humility, commitment, and invaluable contributions to Maine's youth camping industry.

The Maine Youth Camping Foundation dba Maine Summer Camps

Maine Summer Camps is a membership organization for camp directors, staff, parents and supporters of camping and outdoor adventure programs for children and youth. It is dedicated to quality youth camping experiences for children of all ages from all parts of the world.

The Foundation also provides education and training programs for both professional and volunteer leaders of the more than 200 camps in Maine. It conducts a Junior Maine Guide program in cooperation with the Maine State Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife. Foundation leaders provide counsel and support in the development of a State of Maine Program for Trip Leader Training and Certification.

Membership dues, along with contributions and grants provide the resources for the programs of the Foundation. The organization is a 501(c)3 non-profit corporation. Volunteers, under the leadership of an elected board of directors, conduct programs and activities of the foundation.

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