Maine Summer Camps
Real Kids. Real Camps. Real Maine!

NEWS

NOVEMBER 2026

A Majestic Day for the Migis Meet Up

There could not have been a better way to mark the first full day of fall than to gather 98 camp professionals from MSC member camps and MYCA and MSC boards for a morning of connection and mutual learning at the beautiful Migis Lodge in South Casco! We are grateful to the Porta family for inviting us again to debrief the summer and to enjoy an amazing gourmet lunch together.

Members of our Member Engagement Committee were present in full force to welcome everyone. MSC president Terri Mulks, director of Camp Susan Curtis, kicked off the brief meeting with introductions from all 98 present. Awards Committee chair, Rich Deering, alumni and community director of Birch Rock Camp, provided an update on the 2026 Halsey Gulick and Jack Erler Awards. Recipients have been chosen but were not present at this year's Meet Up. Both awards will be presented later. President Mulks convened a Special Meeting of the membership for the purpose of voting in the **MSC Board Slate**. Immediate past president, Matt Pines, managing director of Maine Lakes Retreats, presented the slate for a unanimous vote before the meeting was adjourned. Secretary Matt Cornish, director of Camp Beech Cliff, announced the meeting was historically short having lasted one minute. Education chair and MSC vice president Karen Malm provided information about the debrief offerings before sending participants on their way.

"I really appreciated the conversations throughout the morning. The discussions generated by the community were thoughtful and engaging, and I hope people left feeling energized, with some new ideas to consider or feeling good about ideas they were already working on. Hopefully, people also left with strengthened existing connections as well as some newly minted ones."

Malm said she's grateful to the Education Committee for jumping back into meetings and planning so soon after the summer to get the Meet Up organized, and to all the facilitators who gave their time throughout the morning. She emphasized that the willingness of facilitators from the Education Committee and the Executive Committee to lead the conversations made it possible



Migis Lodge's Scott Malm announced that they employed camp staff from two MSC camps at season's end.

to offer 27 sessions with a broad array of topics. Here are three titles to provide a simple snapshot: ***Teaching Camp Culture to New Staff & Supporting Staff Who Have Grown Up at Camp, Aha! Moments from Summer 2026: Small things that made a big difference,*** and ***Running Camp in Challenging Economic Times.***

What happens now is a review by the full Education Committee of the notes the facilitators took. They will share information that may be helpful to the community in the near term and look at the discussions for ideas that will inform future MSC educational offerings like the Winter Workshop (to be held on Wednesday, February 3, 2027) and other online and in-person opportunities before summer 2027. The entire MSC community will benefit from what we learned at Migis Lodge in this first event of the season. Following lunch, the MSC Board gathered in person for their first meeting of this fiscal year to continue their significant efforts to support member camps. ■

Note: The Education Committee is adding more members given the scope of their current projects. Please contact Lucy at **camps@mainecamps.org** to learn more.

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A membership association for Maine youth camps
Lucy J. Norvell, *Executive Director*
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MESSAGE FROM THE MSC PRESIDENT

OCTOBER 2026



Perhaps the most common question a Camp Director hears in September is, "How was your summer?"

While there are multiple ways to answer that highly loaded question, our automatic response is: "It was good!" (Definition: Of a desired standard, adequate, or well-made.)

And while that isn't fake news, is that the real and complete answer to the question? Of course it was good. We are incredibly dedicated to impacting campers—putting our heads down for 6-10 weeks and making a positive impact on kids, families, and staff members. We've got the stories and stats to back it all up. In many cases it was even great!

But let's not overlook at least one component of the real answer: "It was hard!" (Definition: Needing a lot of physical or mental effort, or being hard to understand and deal with).

And…

That's the answer we don't discuss enough. Or, truthfully, even say enough. Maybe to ourselves quietly but not to one another out loud.

We don't just do hard things. We excel at hard things! As friends, as colleagues, as professionals in a misunderstood profession, let's spend our time together over the next year talking about things that are hard and how we master them and how we can get better at them and how we can take care of ourselves in the process.

We don't have to be stoic, we don't have to hide our frustrations, we can answer the question without couching our true feelings. We are already doing the things. Now let's talk about the things.

THIS JOB IS HARD!!!! Shout it from the rooftops, my friends, because it isn't getting any easier.

Such an uplifting letter, right? It is when you think about the role of MSC. We are the support for this challenging profession. For this hard work. We recognize that not only is it HARD but it's also somewhat unexplainable. It takes a toll. We are familiar with decision-fatigue, with the need for self-care, with a job that no one outside of the profession fully understands because it is such a mix of wildly unconnected jobs: meteorologist, plumber, teacher, counselor, office manager, coach, friend, supervisor, banker, landscaper, programmer, custodian, documentarian, advisor, etc. We've got you! We want to hear from you. Share what's hard so that we can help!

Take care,

Terri L Mulks

Terri Mulks
Director, Camp Susan Curtis
President, Maine Summer Camps

MYCA UPDATE

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



With this being my first MYCA President's letter, I thought I'd give you all a quick introduction. I'm Maja (pronounced "Maya".) I've been a MYCA board member for two years, and a lifelong camp person. I'm excited to step into this new role and thankful for the amazing leadership at MYCA as I do.

To start, a few updates and reminders from the summer.

As many of you may have seen in mid-June, Maine announced a new mandated reporter curriculum. In-person trainers were told to pause training on the old curriculum, and only online training on the new curriculum could be used. Thanks to the swift work of Newell and Lucy, camps were grandfathered in to use in-person trainers for 2026 only. The new requirement is now that anyone regularly working with children must take the Mandated Reporter training every two years, changed from four years. Anyone who used the old curriculum in 2026 must do the new training in 2027. **You can find more about Mandated Reporter training here.** The state has agreed to offer a "Train the Trainer" course for our camp professionals who wish to become approved to offer the official Mandated Reporter training during their camps' staff training in June.

An ongoing theme from summer 2026 is: ***What to do in any scenerio involving bats.*** The best resource is always Maine **CDC.** They provide clear and concise information on what to do in any scenario.

What's happening now?

It's an election year, and once the 133rd Maine Legislature convenes in January 2027, MYCA will again monitor legislation.

In the meantime, we're planning another **Hall of Flags** event. A number of camps of all types in Maine, and some MYCA board members, will be invited to spend the morning from 8am to noon on Thursday, February 25, 2027, representing Maine camps in the Hall of Flags at the State House.

Along with Lucy and Newell, I will have our post-camp meeting with HIP in very late October and will provide an update on summer inspections and licensing and other points of discussion in future communications.

Maja

Maja Toncic
Assistant Director, Camp Pinecliffe for Girls
MYCA President

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.



Bette Bussel and Jack Erler celebrate her award at a luncheon in October that included a few Presidents of ACANE from Maine camps who worked closely with Bette, including Carol Sudduth, Steve Sudduth, and Pam Cobb.

Bette Bussel, Executive Director of ACA New England for 30 years, is Honored as the 2025 Jack Erler Award Honoree

Bette Bussel, who served as the executive director of ACA New England for 30 years, was the 2025 recipient of the Jack Erler Award. On behalf of MYCA and MSC, Steve Sudduth of Wyonegonic Camps stood in for Jack to present Bette with the award at the Maine State Meeting held at the New England Camp Conference last spring. Jack was unable to present the award at that time.

This October, we invited Jack and Bette to celebrate with former ACA New England board presidents from Maine who worked closely with them both, as well as members of the staff including Ron Hall and Mary Ellen Deschenes.

From the award nomination: "Bette has contributed so much to camping both in New England and in Maine. She truly cares about camps and kids!"

The collaboration between MYCA/MSC and ACA New England dates back decades and has strengthened MYCA/MCYF as an organization today and Maine camping overall because of the commitment of Jack Erler, Bette Bussel, and numerous officers and members of the MYCA and MYCF boards over the organization's history. ■

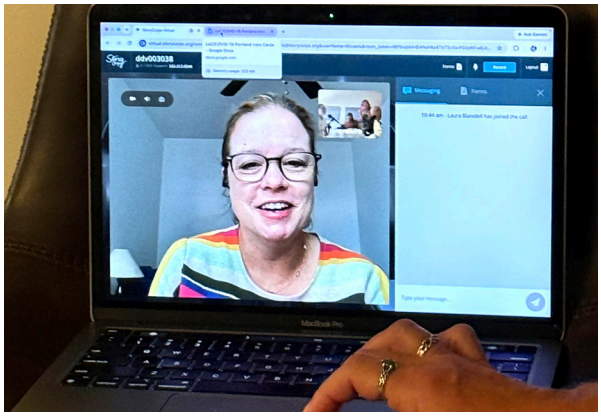


The Audacious Joy of Being at Camp Together in Summer 2020

MSC StoryCorps recordings on COVID times now archived in Library of Congress



Catriona "Cat" Sangster, Ron Hall, and Dr. Laura Blaisdell (below) recorded stories and observations of summer 2020.



StoryCorps came to Portland, ME, in July of 2026 to record stories of early COVID times (in the spring and summer of 2020) with essential workers and a few invited others. MSC was invited to make a recording about what camps in Maine and MSC were doing at that time. The mission of StoryCorps is "to help us believe in each other by illuminating the humanity and possibility in us all — one story at a time." All interviews are preserved at the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C.

The three MSC members who made the recording were: Ron Hall, executive director, who retired in late 2022; Laura Blaisdell, then-member of the state task force on COVID for Maine CDC and camp health center director at Camp Winnebago; and Catriona "Cat" Sangster, then-chair of the MSC Education Committee, director of Camp Wawenock, and former president of Maine Summer Camps. ■

Click here to hear this historic recording and to learn more about StoryCorps and this interview.

Mark your calendar!

2026-27 Events

BOARD MEETINGS (Virtual unless otherwise noted)

Wednesday, November 4, 2026, 10am-noon — MYCA Board

Wednesday, December 2, 10am-noon — MYCA Working Group

Wednesday, January 6, 2027, 10am-noon — MYCA Board

Thursday, February 4, 10am-noon — MSC Board, DoubleTree by Hilton Portland, South Portland (IN PERSON)

Wednesday, February 10, 10am-noon — MYCA Working Group

Wednesday, March 3, 10am-noon — MYCA Board

Wednesday, April 7, 10am-noon — MYCA Work Session

Wednesday, May 5, 10am-noon — MYCA Board

Wednesday, May 12, 10am-noon — MSC Board

EVENTS, WORKSHOPS & MEETINGS (Virtual or in person)

Wednesday, November 18, 1-2pm — Program Improvement Opportunity Honoring Native American Heritage Month (VIRTUAL)

Wednesday, December 2, 4:30-6:30pm — MSC Campfire. Details and location TBA. Hosted by DEI Committee (IN PERSON)

Wednesday, February 3, 2027, 9am-12pm — Winter Workshop followed by Business Networking Extravaganza — 12:15-2:45pm, DoubleTree by Hilton Portland, South Portland (IN PERSON)

Thursday, February 25, 8:30am-1pm — MYCA Hall of Flags Event, State House, Augusta (IN PERSON)

Friday, March 19— 4:30-6pm — Maine State Meeting and Social, New England Camp Conference, Manchester, NH (IN-PERSON)

Wednesday, April 14, 10am-noon — MSC/MYCA Annual Meeting (VIRTUAL)

PROFESSIONAL CONFERENCE DATES & LOCATIONS

Tuesday, February 16 – Friday, February 19, 2027, American Camp Association Conference, Kentucky International Convention Center, Louisville. Early Bird Registration ends December 16, 2026.

Friday, February 19 – Sunday, February 21, CODACON, Hotel Distil, Louisville, KY

Tuesday, March 9 – Thursday, March 11, Tri-State Camp Conference, Atlantic City Convention Center, Atlantic City, NJ, Early Bird Registration ends January 29, 2027

Thursday, March 18 – Saturday, March 20, New England Camp Conference, DoubleTree by Hilton Downtown, Manchester, NH, Early Bird Registration ends February 1, 2027

Please visit our Google Calendar for Committee Meeting dates https://mainecamps.org/committees-and-working-groups/

Click here for the MSC Google Calendar link



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2026 Impact Report on Campers Attending Maine Summer Camps with Support from L.L. Bean

Thanks to the generous support of L.L. Bean, Maine Summer Camps helped make the life-changing experience of summer camp accessible to children and families who otherwise may not have had the opportunity to attend.

In 2026, L.L. Bean campership funding supported 154 Maine children attending 40 Maine summer camps across the state—an increase in both campers and camps participating, despite the twenty percent funding cut from LL Bean. Together, participating camps awarded more than $270,000 including $65,000 in L.L. Bean funding, in campership assistance, to help families overcome financial barriers and ensure that children could benefit from safe, enriching summer experiences.

DATA SUMMARY

157 campers received financial assistance

40 Maine summer camps participated

$273,929 awarded in campership support (this amount includes L.L. Bean's $65,000)

$571,104 in total camp tuition leveraged

$1,745 average campership awarded per camper approximately

$3,638 average value of each camp experience approximately

131 campers attended overnight camps

26 campers attended day camps

79 campers (more than 50%) experienced camp for the first time

75 returning campers were able to continue their camp journey (we know that summer over summer experiences at camp are very valuable)

79 Maine communities represented

5-18 Participants ranged in age from 5 to 18 years old (this is an amazing age range!)

TESTIMONIALS

Behind every statistic is a child whose summer — and often, their future — has been changed.

One camp shared how L.L. Bean's support enabled six children to attend nine sessions of camp:



L.L. Bean financial aid supported this West End House camper seen here dribbling the basketball.

> *Because of your generosity, we will be able to sponsor nine sessions of summer camp for six children. This opportunity will provide them with meaningful experiences, new friendships, personal growth, and memories that will last a lifetime.*

For many campers, the experience extends well beyond a single summer. One camp described the impact on a returning camper:

> *This will be her third season with us, and she embraces camp wholeheartedly. There were so many tears when we said goodbye last year. We all wish she could stay with us all summer!*

Another camp reflected on watching campers grow over multiple summers:

> *It has been amazing watching these young men grow both personally and as musicians through our program. We are committed to helping them return to camp for as long as they are willing and able, and we are grateful to L.L. Bean for continuing to assist with funding.*

Parents also see the difference camp makes. One family shared:

> *Farm Camp gave her confidence, friendships, and a love for the outdoors that came home with her — along with a few flowers tucked behind her ear.*

And another family expressed how the camp experience would not have been possible without the generosity L.L. Bean (Note that some of the financial aid awards make up the gap between what parents can afford and what camp costs.):

> *Our kids have fallen in love with their time at Camp and they cannot imagine a summer without camp. My husband and I both work very hard, but our salaries are unfortunately not enough to cover camp tuition expenses in full. We really appreciate the camp scholarship funds to help!*

2026 L.L. Bean Impact Report *continues on page 7*

2026 L.L. Bean Impact Report *continued from page 6*

FUNDING IMPACT

Lucy Norvell, MSC executive director, reported: "Summer camp provides far more than recreation. It builds confidence, independence, resilience, leadership, friendship, and a lifelong connection to Maine's outdoors. For many recipients, an L.L. Bean campership made attendance possible when it otherwise would have been financially out of reach."

By partnering with Maine Summer Camps, L.L. Bean's investment helped remove barriers for 157 young people. Every campership represents more than financial assistance; it represents an opportunity for a child to discover new strengths, build meaningful connections, and return home and to school with increased confidence and skills that will benefit them long after the summer ends.

L.L. Bean's continued commitment to expanding access to summer camp is helping ensure that more Maine children, regardless of financial circumstance, can experience the lifelong benefits of camp. In our next newsletter we will profile the **Level Ground Initiative**, beneficiary of L.L. Bean's $15,000 earmarked to support the initiative's significant administrative costs. ■

75 Spellers from MSC Camps at the 2026 Tournament

Five camps participated: five in the 12-Under (12-U) tournament, and four in the 13-Over (13-O) tournament. Wigwam took the team championship in both age groups.

There were 75 spellers, with 51 in the 12-U and 24 in the 13-O:

- Wigwam - 16 spellers
- Wildwood - 15 spellers
- Ceder - 19 spellers
- Fernwood - 10 spellers
- Fernwood Cove - 15 spellers



Fernwood Cove camper, Nora, 13-O winner with her Camp Wigwam-crafted trophy.

The individual winner in the 12-U category was Charlie from Wildwood, and the runner-up was Henry from Wildwood.

The individual winner in the 13-O category was Nora from Fernwood Cove, and the runner-up was Sam from Wildwood.

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Junior Maine Guide Program Reaches 90th Anniversary Milestone in Summer 2027

Forging leaders through outdoor camping experiences

Lynn O'Donnell remembers the moment well: earlier this summer, she chose two kids in the **Junior Maine Guide (JMG)** program to participate in an ax-throwing event put on by some lumberjacks who were displaying their skills.

"I picked one of the girls from the GS Camp Natarswi, a second-year candidate from Calais, Maine, and a boy from my high school," said O'Donnell, a co-leader at JMG and a teacher at Lake Region High School. "He's a big kid, so I thought this would go well. He went up and didn't hit the target. I thought, 'My gosh, they make it look so easy, and it isn't.'"

O'Donnell turned to the girl, who had become anxious and kept looking at her watch that tracked her heart rate, which was rising.

"I can't do this, I'm so nervous," the girl said, quivering.

O'Donnell began talking the girl down, reminding her of her strength and how much she had already accomplished. Buoyed by the pep talk, the girl strode forward, grabbed the ax… and struck the target.

"Ax-throwing isn't even one of the JMG skills," O'Donnell said. "It was just resilience. That kid's life was changed, and it happened because she was at Test Camp. I had just thrown an ax and knew how scary it was. She stepped up and did it."

When O'Donnell thinks about JMG reaching its 90th year of forging leaders through outdoor camping experiences and the lessons they carry, that's the story that first comes to mind—kids tackling challenges, sometimes facing fears, and always with an education built by JMG role models to guide them.

O'Donnell, Bruce McDonald and Bill Southwick, JMG's three co-leaders, embody what has made the organization special for nine decades. They participated as teens, trained under examiners who became mentors, and later brought their own children on staff. They stay involved because it's part of the fabric of who they are. Their experiences shaped their own maturity, their careers and their time as camp leaders.

"I learned independence at an early age," McDonald said. "I could be myself. I could be appreciated for who I was."

These JMG leaders value old-fashioned standards and the way they test kids, giving them a chance to solve problems, ask for help, and persevere when things go off track. And they know that passing the program matters less than kids leaving excited to come back, or even just having memories to give them confidence later in life.

The lessons, and those memories, instilled through the JMG program never disappear.



All three JMG Co-Leaders were candidates the same summer as teens (L to R): Bill Southwick (O-At-Ka), Lynn O'Donnell (Pondicherry), and Bruce McDonald (Winona)

"You learn how to lead people and how to live with people," McDonald said. "And you learn how to work outside in the environment comfortably."

Back in August, the testing period brought together 60 people: 40 candidates, 10 counselors and 10 JMG examiners. One night, while sitting around a fire, an adult asked, "How many of you wrote about JMG in your college application?"

"The whole back row of examiners raised their hands, and so did probably 50 or 60 percent of the counselors, because most of the counselors from participating MSC camps did the program," Southwick said. "That's why they're there. The kids look around and say, 'Really?'"

The one change these leaders wish for is more candidates, and more camps, to participate. Numbers have fallen from 70 a year before the pandemic. Bringing back both would allow more kids to experience JMG.

"We are reaching out to new camps and old camps that worked with JMG previously," McDonald said. "I want to understand their challenges and find ways to help them join us now."

The lessons endure but have also evolved over time. Learning rules for rifles and fishing rods has been replaced by a wildlife identification test. Stoves are considered an accepted tool for cooking; only campfires were allowed previously. Trenches are no longer dug down to mineral soil around campsites because it's frowned upon environmentally now.

"There's no JMG way," Southwick said. "There's doing it well, doing it safely, and having a good time outdoors."

Among the 40 candidates who tested this year, 28 passed. That 70-percent pass rate was twice the normal amount. Usually, a third of the group advances. Perhaps most interesting is that two

***Junior Maine Guide Program** continues on page 9*



Bill Margolin Memorial Chess Tournament

Pictured above, Ryan Wilensky, camp director of West End House Camp, and Daniel, a competitor in the Bill Margolin Memorial Chess Tournament held on July 30. The tournament will be held each July in honor of West End House Camp's late executive director, who was passionate about chess and about the camp he led for 50+ years.

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Junior Maine Guide Program *continued from page 8*

thirds of the candidates who pass on their first time are female.

"Across all 90 years, though, the overall passing numbers are almost exactly 50-50 between boys and girls," Southwick said. "Some of that is explained by huge groups of boys in certain years, and some of it is that the boys come back and keep fighting for it."

When it comes to JMG, the effort to keep thriving for another century remains strong. That's what happens when something is so unique.

"The same things that attracted us are still attracting them: the traditions, the skills, and the hard work," O'Donnell said. "They all know it's hard, especially if they've tried it once, and they still come back." ■

Future Camp Leaders Benefit from Thurber's Coaching



Seventy-seven counselors-in-training along with Dr. Chris Thurber at the July workshop held at Camp Wawenock.

A huge number of counselors-in-training (CITs) from MSC camps (77!) participated in the workshop Chris Thurber led at Camp Wawenock in early July. These young CITs benefited from a seasoned camp conference presenter and thought leader in our field with extensive experience presenting at the national ACA conference, the New England Camp Conference, and the Tri-State Camp Conference.

Chris has a long history of designing and delivering workshops to CITs in Maine, also. Last summer marked 26 years of nearly successive workshops, broken only during 2020 due to the COVID pandemic. The first Thurber workshop was held in 2000.

When asked about changes over the years, Chris replied, "As for how camp staff have changed in two-plus decades, I'd say, on the plus side, they take their responsibilities more seriously; on the minus side, they are more distracted from their jobs by internet-connected devices."

A very powerful part of this session involved role-playing various challenging conversations that come up between campers and CITs, with Chris coaching and sharing possible language to use and try. We heard back from several camps that their CITs returned to camp with new management methods and counseling skills. ■

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Maine Camp History

Birch Rock Camp: 1926-2026

By Henry Paul Johnson, Historian of Maine Summer Camps



Rich Deering, Birch Rock Camp's director of alumni and community, pictured top left, connecting with campers.

Camp Birch Rock in Waterford, Maine, celebrates 100 years of continuous operation this year. Under the guidance of Richard Deering, who has been a main stay at the camp for some 53 years, Birch Rock provides boys ages 7-16 the opportunity to learn, grow, and experience the great tradition of the Maine camping experience.

As set forth in "Birch Rock Camp 1926-2001: A Short History," which was prepared as part of the observance of the then-75th anniversary of the camp:

"To understand the camp, it helps to know something of the life of its founders. Both were born and brought up in Vermont. Bill (William Russel Brewster) and Leona ("Oni") (Wright) Brewster found themselves without a parent early in their lives."

"Both grew up between 1900 and 1920, a time when education was seen as immensely valuable to personal and intellectual growth, and also as the key to moving from the drudgery of traditional occupations like farming to the respect and economic benefits of a new professional, urbanized middle class."

Bill was a graduate of Kimball Union Academy in New Hampshire and Middlebury College. Oni shared "her husband's principles." In 1933, Oni entered Boston University, where she studied education, specializing in the teaching of reading.

Beginning with the early days of the camp, there was a unique feature of the camp's land: a birch tree. The tree had seeded itself on top of a large area near the shore. To the knowledge of this Historian, that same birch tree remains.

In Birch Rock's first season, which ran from July 1 to August 27, 1926, the fee was some $300. A brochure from that first year stated that the center of its daytime activities included 150 acres of "glorious woodland" for the boys to enjoy.

Birch Rock, beginning in 1926, proposed to teach boys how to camp — that is, how to derive the greatest benefit from

***Birch Rock Camp History** continues on page 12*



Summit presenters (L to R): R. Berry, D. Schiff, Paddy Fuller, Katie Williams, and S. Baillargeon

'Ascend to Your Career' Summit at UMaine Farmington

MSC recently joined students, employers, and outdoor recreation professionals at the University of Maine at Farmington's (UMF) annual Ascend to Your Career Summit, an event designed to connect students with career pathways across Maine's outdoor recreation industry.

The summit provides an especially valuable opportunity for Maine's camps. Camp employment gives students the chance to build skills in leadership, communication, problem-solving, teamwork, outdoor education, and more, all while spending a summer making a meaningful difference in the lives of young people. For camps, the summit creates a direct connection with students who may be looking for summer jobs, internships, or a first step toward a longer-term career in outdoor recreation and youth development.

MSC visited classes exploring topics with direct relevance to the camp community, including a sports management class, an anthropology course on climate change, and a business class. Pictured above are the camp professionals who visited classes with Lucy including: Dave Schiff, MSC board member and Staffing Committee chair and co-owner/director of Camp Manitou, Rayleen Berry and Sarah Baillargeon, assistant camp directors of Pine Tree Camp, Paddy Fuller, associate director at Fernwood Cove, and Katie Williams, MSC board member and director of Wolfe's Neck Farm Camp.

These conversations underscored the many ways that camps intersect with UMF's academic programs and students' career interests. Camps are not only places for recreation; they are employers, educators, outdoor organizations, and training grounds for future professionals. A summer position or internship can provide students with hands-on experience and transferable skills that carry into careers in education, recreation, nonprofit leadership, environmental work, business, and beyond.

A huge shoutout goes to Dave Schiff of Camp Manitou and chair of the MSC Staffing Committee who initiated this opportunity to represent MSC's camp community at UMF, exchange ideas with students and faculty, and help students discover the many ways that working at camp can fit into their future. ■

Birch Rock Camp History *continued from page 11*

an experience in the open into how to help boys develop emotionally, physically, mentally, socially, and spiritually. Birch Rock continues today to help boys to develop in the same physical, mental, and social ways.

The activities featured at Birch Rock have varied throughout the years. At one time, Birch Rock had a writing program, which has since phased out. Because of its beautiful area adjacent to Lake McWain, Birch Rock serves to permit boys the opportunity for multiple lake activities, such as swimming, canoeing, and sailing. Land sport activities continue today including baseball, soccer, and tennis. Birch Rock has had, and continues to have, what is described as an ambitious "trip program," which provides boys the opportunity to experience the backwoods for a few days, not only within the state of Maine, but also within New Hampshire and near the Canadian border.

The Birch Rock dining room is particularly noteworthy. The camp has carved into the rafters of the dining room the name of every camper that has ever attended the camp. To this Historian, there can be no more precious historical marking than the placement of all camper names within the dining facility in which campers eat each day of their camp experience.

In 1996, Rich Deering became Birch Rock's director, first part-time and then full-time. As written by Mike Mattson '83 in the Spring 2003 edition of The Birch Bark publication:

"I've been working side by side with Rich for three decades, and I know who has propelled Birch Rock from a 40-camper camp in the mid-90s to the 150-camper enterprise we are today. We have Rich to thank, and his far-reaching friendships and connections, and his uncanny ability to draw wonderful people to Birch Rock. Because this camp means everything to Rich, he's inspired countless people to dedicate themselves, as well — including me."

Mattson continued:

"Each summer, Rich has a remarkable way of helping new staff settle into camp and understand their roles quickly. He's the first to jump in to help anyone who is struggling. He mentors staff members, new and old, as they mature and develop in their roles. On the waterfront, Rich's happiest spot, he has been helping campers become more confident and skilled in the water his entire career."

This Historian had the opportunity to visit Birch Rock camp this summer. I personally observed a library building steeped in great tradition. I met campers and staff who have attended in a camper or staff capacity for many years. All seemed happy to share in the joy of the 100-year history of Birch Rock Camp.

I was presented, during my visit to Birch Rock on its 100th anniversary, with a booklet titled "Birch Rock Camp Songs." This 14-page compilation included numerous song offerings, including "Almamatar," "Hiking Song," "Sunset Song," "The Birch Rock Marching Song," and others.

This Historian was proud to experience the 100th anniversary of Birch Rock Camp where both Maine camp tradition and the specific traditions of Birch Rock Camp remain. As set forth in the Sunset Song:

"O'er the hills of sunset splendor
Dazzles every eye.
See the gray smoke from the campfire
Cross the crimson sky.
Thus another day has ended
We're glad we spent it here.
(Where?) at BIRCH ROCK CAMP!
Let your voices ring out
IN a thundering sunset cheer."

Cheer! Cheer! To Birch Rock Camp on its 100th anniversary! ■



This article is written by noted author and Historian of Maine Summer Camps, Henry Johnson, who attended Camp Powhatan in Otisfield, Maine from 1966 through 1979 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 to Mr. Johnson relating to the history of any Maine summer camp, you may do so at the following email: hjohnson@henryjohnsonlaw.com.



Level Ground Campers Oracle and Luca Tell Their Story



Oracle and one of his camp friends

Level Ground is a unique initiative that touches many people's lives. Right now, Raine Kerhin, Level Ground initiative coordinator, and the Level Ground Committee are doing a deep dive into the data and the specifics of the program to provide a more comprehensive report.

In the meantime, we are sharing one family's Level Ground experience at one MSC camp to illustrate the sheer importance and impact of MSC's Level Ground Initiative, as it creates access to camp experiences for children who otherwise would not have the chance to attend or benefit. One of the brothers featured in the story, Oracle, delivered remarks about his camp experience to donors at a recent fundraiser.

> ***Hi, my name is Oracle, and I am writing this with my brother, Luca. We want to tell you about our experiences at camp. We had a lot of fun and got a lot of badges! The first session of camp was especially great because we got to see some of our friends from the year before. That was awesome! And now, Luca is going to tell you more about the Wolf hiking trip…***
>
> ***It was awesome and fun, and we swam in a river. The food was great, and I had a lot of fun. Back to Oracle…***
>
> ***The Moose hiking trip was really similar to Luca's experience. We had a lot of good food, and hiking was probably the most exciting part of the trip. Camp makes us feel like we are part of a community, and we can't wait to go back next year! Camp is like a boot camp, but instead of getting ready to go to war, it prepares us to go in the real world.***



MSC MEMBER PROFILE

Beyond Camp: Matt Pines Turns Camp Experience into a Case for Change

MSC MEMBER PROFILE: *This is the third installment in an MSC newsletter series focused on how camp leaders in Maine are changing the world beyond camp by sharing experience, skills, and knowledge gained from their camp careers. In this issue, we profile* ***Matt Pines,*** *former co-owner and co-director of Maine Teen Camp and current managing director of Maine Lakes Retreats.*

For Matt Pines, the lessons of summer camp belong in conversations far beyond the cabin line. After three decades in camping, he is bringing his experience into research on adolescent wellbeing, and urging camp professionals to recognize how much they can contribute to decisions affecting children in their communities.

"Camp professionals need to be more confident in using their experience as their credential," he says.

Pines' involvement in research at Maine Teen Camp reflects a larger ambition: to help parents, educators, public health professionals, and policymakers understand what camp offers young people, and why those experiences deserve investment.

The recently published study, **"Impact of a device-free summer camp on adolescent mental health and wellbeing,"** offers evidence to inform that conversation. At Maine Teen Camp in the first year, and at other Maine summer camps the following year, researchers assessed 192 teenagers at the beginning and end of camp sessions lasting two to three and a half weeks. Their overall Mind Health Quotient (MHQ) scores increased by an average of 10.1 points, with a larger median improvement of 27 points among teens who arrived experiencing mental health struggles. The largest gains were in adaptability and resilience, followed by social self and cognition.

For Pines, those findings connect with changes he has watched unfold over many summers. A teenager arrives unsure how to approach unfamiliar peers. A few days later, that same camper is trying something new, navigating a disagreement, or sticking with an activity that initially felt frustrating.

He believes these everyday moments help explain why camp matters. "It's not just that devices are absent — it's that all these other beneficial things are present," he says.

Pines points to the initial awkwardness of meeting new people as one example. At camp, young people have opportunities to work through that discomfort and begin building relationships. A phone, he observes, can offer an easy escape from the very moment when a connection might otherwise begin.



Campers completing pre-camp MHQ surveys on paper. Paper vs digital administration is a live issue in camp outcome studies.

Learning a skill presents another opportunity. Paddling a canoe, playing guitar, or finding a route up a climbing wall takes patience and practice. Pines sees that "productive struggle" as part of learning to tolerate frustration and take pride in an accomplishment.

The study also underscores the importance of the social environment: 44 percent of campers reported a stronger sense of belonging at camp than at school, and 40 percent found it easier to make friends. Improvements in belonging, exercise, sleep, and diet were associated with improved MHQ scores. Those findings do not isolate which part of camp produced the changes, or establish that removing devices alone caused them. Understanding how the many ingredients work together, Pines argues, is a reason to keep researching.

That is where his work extends beyond running a summer program. He wants the camp community to gather evidence, learn from one another, and communicate its value in terms that people outside the industry can understand. Describing the "magic of camp," he says, is no longer enough when asking others to support it. Camp professionals need to explain what happens, how much it helps, and which practices contribute to better outcomes.

His hopes are ambitious. He imagines a future in which pediatricians could prescribe camp, and families might have new ways to help pay for it, such as through health insurance or government subsidies. These aspirations reflect the purpose behind his interest in research: making meaningful camp experiences available to more children.

Pines also sees a role for camp professionals closer to home. School boards, parks committees, and local planning groups make decisions about the environments in which children grow up. Camp leaders, he believes, bring valuable firsthand knowledge to those discussions, including an understanding of outdoor play, independence, and time with peers.

Beyond Camp *continues on page 16*

MSC Camps Milestones in Summer 2026

Camps are unique, and camp administrators are fond of saying there's a camp for everyone. Camps that have reached or eclipsed the 100-year mark have done so through times of both smooth and not-so-smooth political, social, and economic times. Yet they have continued to strive to fulfill their own missions, acknowledging that they are not a match for every child — but they have filled a niche for thousands and thousands of children over many generations. By honoring their traditions, yet still looking outward, these camps have positioned themselves, their campers, staff, and alumni well into the 21st century and beyond.

CENTENNIALS

Birch Rock Camp **(See story on page 11)**

Camp Kieve

100+ CELEBRATIONS

Camp Arcadia—110th Reunion

Camp Runoia—120th Reunion

Our fall newsletter includes celebration details for four camp milestones in Summer 2026. If your camp celebrated a milestone (including one under a century – a tenth, 25th 50th, 75th, etc…) please send details to Lucy at **camps@mainecamps.org** so we can include it in a future newsletter.

Camp Kieve Centennial

The centennial anniversary celebration was held the weekend of Saturday, August 29, 2026

Campers from every generation congregated at **Camp Kieve** in Nobleboro for three days of festivities at the camp. Housed in tents and cabins on the property, attendees enjoyed live music and many camp activities including swimming, sports, cookouts, campfire ceremonies.

Kieve Wavus Education (KWE) empowers people to grow through experiential programs led by inspirational role models. Since the organization was founded in 1926, KWE has evolved into a wide-reaching education nonprofit that cultivates positive contributors to their communities. Located on beautiful Damariscotta Lake in rural Midcoast Maine, KWE has three flagship programs across two main campuses: Camp Kieve for boys, Wavus Camp for girls, and The Leadership School, a teacher education program that teaches our experiential approach to social-emotional learning and environmental stewardship curriculums to Maine school communities. KWE also hosts a wide range of events for a diverse set of groups throughout the year.

Long before the two camps merged in 2005, the Wavus Camps began in 1922 and shared many of the same ideals as Kieve. In 1981, Dick Kennedy started The Leadership School (then Leadership Decisions Institute) in order to help kids from Maine make positive decisions to impact their futures. Today, KWE has programming over 300 days each year, reaching more than 10,000 people annually. By the 1950s, Kieve had a culture worth building on. "Aunt Harriet" Kennedy took over ownership of the camp from founder "Uncle Don" Kennedy. When Dick Kennedy took the reins in 1960, Kieve ended recognition-based contests and instead promoted self-reliance and experiential learning — driving philosophies for all KWE programs to this day. To view more photos from this and every other KWE era, visit the new Centennial Gallery at kwe.org/gallery.

The current CEO, Sam Kennedy, fourth-generation family member and grandson of founder Don Kennedy, officially returned to the camp in 2018, first as an associate director. He became president and CEO in 2022, taking over from his father, Henry. In a recent Lincoln County news article featuring Sam's return to KWE, he said some of the "accomplishments he is happiest with include merging the staff of the organization's three flagship programs: Camp Kieve for boys, Wavus Camp for Girls, and The Leadership School; increasing the nonprofit's commitment to financial aid; and taking part in the Lincoln County Food Initiative, an initiative that delivered food to Lincoln County residents during the COVID-19 pandemic. He said he sees himself as an 'enabler' for the other staff members, being in a position to place them and give them resources to tackle necessary tasks."

Camp Arcadia

Camp Arcadia celebrated 110 years of helping girls build confidence, independence, and lifelong friendships in Maine's outdoors

Camp Arcadia (www.camparcadia.com), a fourth-generation family owned and operated overnight summer camp for girls in Otisfield, ME, kicked off its 110th season in June.

Approximately 200 campers, ages 7 to 17, and 70 staff come to Camp Arcadia each summer, from more than 30 states and a dozen countries. Arcadia's philosophy emphasizes individual growth through guided independence in a supportive, all-girls environment. Campers are encouraged to shape their own programs, explore new interests, develop expertise, and gain confidence through hands-on experience.

A variety of activities were planned in the 110th season to celebrate with campers, staff, alumni and the local community. Camp Arcadia has published an updated songbook to mark the occasion, and will host a community lunch to share its beautiful property with the community and welcome alumnae back to camp during an Alumnae Reunion Weekend in August.

***Camps Milestones** continues on page 16*

Camps Milestones *continued from page 15*

"In today's busy, fast-moving, and digital world, an experience at Arcadia offers something many young people need more than ever: the chance to unplug, live simply, grow in confidence, and discover who they are," said Louise Fritts Johnson, Camp Arcadia's fourth-generation director. "Here, girls learn that confidence in the outdoors becomes confidence in the world. When a girl learns she can paddle a canoe, sleep under the stars, hike a mountain trail, or contribute meaningfully to a community, she begins to understand how capable she truly is."

"We believe each camper should, with guidance, carry out her own individual program," said Anne Henderson Fritts, third-generation director emeritus. "In all our activities, which range from cooking to camping skills, to horseback riding and to tennis, our counselors' encouragement, response, feedback, support, warmth, humor and enthusiasm enable our campers to find their own way, to develop expertise and to investigate new areas of interest in a supportive and nurturing environment."

"We believe girls thrive when given the freedom to try, to lead, to fail, to try again, and to succeed in an environment that is both nurturing and challenging," Johnson added. "At Arcadia, girls build real friendships, learn to live simply and happily with others, and develop the resilience, compassion, and self-reliance that will serve them for life."

Camp Runoia

Immediately after the 2026 season ended, 175 alumni attended the 120th Camp Runoia Reunion

The youngest had her first birthday and the oldest was 93. She attended camp from 1942 to 1955! A beautiful weekend of weather and high spirits enabled everyone to enjoy each other's company, great food, and the beautiful lake and campus. Co-chairs alumna Claire Williamson and director emerita Pam Cobb, and Alumnae Organization president Betsy Nicholson organized the event supported by the Runoia year round staff team Tim Pearson and Ali Wight.

There was a silent auction to raise money for camperships. A tennis tournament, Pickleball tournament, and many other successful fundraising activities were featured. Attendees could also sign up for indigo dying, archery, canoeing, lots of sailing, and—of course—swimming in the lake! The group couldn't have asked for a better occasion to celebrate the 120th and cannot wait to celebrate the 125th in 2031. ■



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Beyond Camp *continued from page 14*

"Recess doesn't have a lobbyist," he says. "Recess doesn't have a marketing budget." Children need adults who will advocate for those vital extracurricular experiences, and Pines wants camp professionals to be among them.

"Recess doesn't have a lobbyist," he says.
"Recess doesn't have a marketing budget."

We asked Pines how this research opportunity at Maine Teen Camp has informed his work in other areas, such as the **Turn the Tide Coalition**, a group that advocates for no smartphones before high school, no social media before 16, no phones in schools, and more free, independent play.

"We should never underestimate the powerful pull of socialization for teens," he replied. "They will want to be where other teens are. If that is the mall or the park or a friend's house, that is where they want to be. If that 'place' is a text thread, Fortnite, Instagram or YouTube, that is where they will be. Camps should be acutely aware of the fact that they are one of the last spaces — maybe the only remaining space — in kids' lives where all the social spaces are in person."

Pines' next goal is collective: more camps measuring outcomes, sharing what they learn, and using that knowledge to improve programs and tell a stronger story. For Pines, changing the world beyond camp begins with carrying camp's lessons into places where decisions are made and helping others see how those lessons could improve childhood. ■