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# To Fill Bunks, Summer Camp Goes on Sale

*Weak Economy, War Worries  
End 10-Year Enrollment Boom;  
Negotiating a Better Deal*

By MICHELLE HIGGINS

**T**HAT EXCLUSIVE SUMMER camp may not be so exclusive this year.

After a decade-long boom, sleep-away camps are seeing a drop in enrollments of as much as 25% this year because of the soft economy and war worries. Elite camps that are normally full by this time of year are still accepting campers, while other camps are wheeling and dealing to get more kids.

Mullins Camp, a camp for fifth and sixth graders in Jackson Hole, Wyo., is offering selected discounts of 10% to 30% in an effort to bolster enrollment. The discounts go to families with more than one child in camp, those who enroll their kids

## FAMILY FINANCE

early and families with financial need. "We kind of went to the wall this year," says Tim Bantle, the program director. In Central California;

River Way Ranch Camp expanded its traditional discount sign-up period earlier this year.

Many of the discounts are aimed at attracting younger campers whose parents are especially anxious about being separated from them this year. Camp Maas, in Ortonville, Mich., is offering to slash fees by as much as 35% for campers entering the second and third grades. Any first-time camper entering grades four to nine gets \$500 off.

The soft bookings mark a turning point for the \$18 billion camping industry. Until now, camp enrollment had grown 8% to 10% a year for a decade. To avoid getting aced out, many parents would rush to sign up for the following year when picking up their kids at the end of the summer—or even on mid-term visiting days. Families who were shut out turned to camp referral services in the hopes that they would be bumped up on the wait list.

Terror alerts and stock-market woes have changed the picture this year. Indeed, camps of all stripes are stepping up security in order to calm parents. CampGroup, which operates eight camps in Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New York and Michigan, has formed an emergency plan for each camp in case a terrorist attack paralyzes their area. Each camp now has a three-day supply of food and fuel, satellite phones at hand and emergency numbers



Many camps are offering deals this year. For a list of some with empty bunks, see Page D2.

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away camps have more slots to fill this year than day camps, which are cheaper and closer to home. Especially flexible: sleep-away camps that have tended in the past to attract a lot of kids from far away.

"People aren't flying across country to go to that golf camp," says a spokeswoman for U.S. Sports Camps, a network of 500 camps across the country. International outfits are in a similar predicament. Village Camps, which operates eight camps in Europe, is seeing a significant drop in American campers this year.

Even camps that aren't discounting fees are offering shorter sessions to attract more campers. Camp Thoreau-In-Vermont is offering a cheaper two-week session in addition to its usual four- to eight-week camps for the first time this year. The camp says it is also handing out more financial aid than usual to campers who qualify.

Of course, a few elite camps say they haven't seen a decline in bookings at all and have wait lists just like they do every year. In the Berkshires in Massachusetts, Camp Greylock, an 88-year-old all-boys camp that charges \$7,700 for seven weeks, is already booked full.

Jewish camps have been particularly hard-hit because parents are concerned they might be terrorism targets. Patti Helfand of Springfield, N.J., is reluctantly sending her 15-year-old daughter to a Jewish sleep-away camp this year. "I'm worried about her being a target," says Ms. Helfand. "We were extremely paranoid last year—even more so this year."

Ms. Helfand is sending a cellphone with her daughter, in case of an emergency, even though the camp frowns upon that.

To be sure, many parents feel camp is the safest place for their kids to be this summer. "It's more comforting to think

she'll be away from this ground zero we live near here," says JoAnn Symons of Bethesda, Md., who is sending her 12-year-old daughter to sleep-away camp on the lower Chesapeake Bay. "The flip to that is we won't be able to get to her

quickly," she says.

Don Cheley, director of Cheley Colorado Camps in Estes Park, Colo., recognizes such concerns, but has a response: "We're experts in dealing with separation anxiety. This is another dimension of that."

## Bartering for Bug Juice

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Camp Maas in Michigan has also installed security gates and cameras throughout facilities on its 1,350 acres to reassure parents.

But the biggest issue facing camps this summer is the economy. Thirteen-year-old Jordan DiPentino of New Town, Pa., wanted to return to his sleep-away camp this year, but is having to make do with day camp instead. His mom decided the family couldn't afford it.

"It's been a bad year on Wall Street," says Rose Jordan, who will pay about \$180 a week this year for her son's camp, compared with \$600 a week last year.

In a marked departure from the boom years, some camps are willing to negotiate—though the amount of wiggle room varies. In general, sleep-

*Please Turn to Page D2, Column 1*

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## Bartering for Bug Juice

Because of the war and the soft economy, bunks are still available at many summer camps that are usually full by this time of year. Below, a sampling:

CAMP	COST*	COMMENTS
<b>Mullins Camp</b> Jackson Hole, Wyo. Mullinscamp.com	\$2,795 for four weeks	This residential camp for 5th and 6th graders is offering <b>select discounts of 10%-30%</b> to encourage campers to sign up.
<b>Camp Maas</b> Ortonville, Mich. Tamarackcamps.com	\$3,295 for four weeks	To get more kids to sign up, this Jewish residence camp is <b>offering \$500 off</b> to first-time campers entering grades four to nine.
<b>Navajo Trails Adventure Camp</b> Bicknell, Utah navajotrails.com	\$3,125 for four weeks	Out-of-towners have been <b>slower</b> to book this year. Campers who pay in full get 3% to 5% off.
<b>Camp Pontiac</b> Copake, N.Y. Camppontiac.com	\$7,350 for seven weeks	There are still a <b>handful of empty bunks</b> in some of the younger cabins.
<b>Camp Olympia</b> Trinity, Texas Campolympia.com	\$2,020 for two weeks	Nearly all sessions have space. A scholarship committee meets in May to <b>determine financial aid</b> for needy families.
<b>Camp Wekeela</b> Hartford, Maine Campwekeela.com	About \$1,000 a week	Enrollments are down 20% at this <b>81-year-old co-ed camp</b> .
<b>Cheley Colorado Camps</b> Estes Park, Colo. Cheley.com	\$3,550 for four weeks	New bookings have been slower this year, partly because <b>most kids have to fly here</b> .
<b>Lochearn Camp for Girls</b> Post Mills, Vt. campaage.com/lochearn/	\$3,950 for four weeks	This all-girls outfit is <b>usually full by November</b> . But this year sign-ups are down 15% to 20%.

\*May vary depending on child's age and program