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Berkshire camp business recovering

By JOHN A. SCHWEIZER

Many summer camps in the Berkshires appear to be climbing back to near-capacity operation after several years of declining enrollments.

Some camp directors say aggressive promotion has been the saving factor; others say changes in programs and philosophy have been responsible for bringing the campers back.

However, some deny having experienced a downswing in enrollment in recent years. They say the trend during the 1960s and this decade has been steadily upward.

Nevertheless, nationwide economic uncertainty from the late 1960s through last year is conceded by most area camp officials, who were interviewed recently, to have been responsible for keeping many children out of camp.

"There's no question that the economic situation scared many parents from sending their kids," said Atty. Rudolph A. Sacco of Pittsfield, owner of Camp Karu.

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His day camp in the town of Washington opened for its 15th season two weeks ago with an enrollment of 50 girls and boys — about three times more than last year. "I think the economy is stabilizing now," he added. "Besides, parents are realizing that kids really like camping."

A major factor in Camp Karu's improved enrollment, Sacco concedes, is better promotion.

"Let's face it," he said, "people have got to know about us. We did a lot more advertising this year. It's vital if we're going to come out of this crisis."

Others agree.

"You just can't rely on word-of-mouth recommendations any more," declared Christopher J. Holt, arts and crafts director at 50-year-old Camp Segowea, the Poughkeepsie (N.Y.) YMCA camp in Southfield. "The Y's have realized this; they're doing more and more promotions, and we had recruitment drives during the winter."

Steadily declining applications over the past five years prompted Camp Segowea to open its gates to girls this year for the first time. Ten of the 50 campers in the first three-week session are girls, Holt said.

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Edwin S. Ulanoff, owner-director of Crane Lake Camp in West Stockbridge, said that his operation still relies heavily on word-of-mouth promotion but that he has run several advertisements in the New York Times. Crane Lake's capacity has increased from 150 to 180 campers since 1970, and so has its enrollment, he said.

"Some of the kids skip a summer to go vacationing with their families, then return two years later," said Ulanoff.

Camp Taconic, one of several resident camps on Lake Ashmere in Hinsdale, claims a coed enrollment of 200, the same as last year.

"We have no newspaper ads," said Mrs. Robert Kinoy, whose family has run the 40-year-old camp for 26 years. "We're members of the Berkshire Hills Conference, and that's all the promotion we need. About 75 per cent of our campers return for a second year."

The conference, which is the tourist promotion agency for the Berkshires, is bullish on the suitability of the Berkshires for camps, which can be expected.

"This is the best camping area in the country," asserted Executive Director John V. Geary. "We have everything — culture, history, nature. The camps seem to be doing fine this year. The bad weather doesn't hurt their business, of course, since their reservations are made during the winter."

Bert Margolis, a director of Greylock Camp for Boys on Center Lake, Becket, agrees with Geary's assessment of the Berkshires for camping. But he said he wishes the state would do more promotion.

"This is one of the greatest areas in the East for camping," he said. "The State of Maine spends plenty on their camping industry, but Massachusetts does very little."

But Margolis is not complaining about his own situation. Greylock, which dates from 1916 and is the oldest

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camp in the Berkshires, has an enrollment of 353 boys and has been operating at capacity for "many years." At \$1,350 per boy for an eight-week session, it is also the most expensive camp in the area. Greylock does not advertise, relying solely on personal recommendations.

Margolis claims a waiting list of 50 boys. Moreover, he said, at least 35 boys are third-generation campers and about 60 are second generation.

"What do we offer?" he asked. "We've stuck with tradition—teaching citizenship and responsibility. We don't believe in new gimmicks. We have structure here, but our boys have always been allowed to have a say in what kind of programs we offer."

Margolis said the traditional dicta, such as physical fitness and athletics, is integral to the Greylock program, but so too are such fields as creative arts, music and, lately, electronics.

"The camp identity is important," he said.

Camp Deerwood on Lake Buel, Great Barrington, on the other hand, is typical of those that have changed their program concept.

"We let the kids choose their own activities," explained owner Zoltan Zantay. "You can't tell a kid what to do anymore. These kids are sophisticated nowadays; they need sophisticated activities. Old camping is out. If I were to run around with an Indian feather on my head, they'd think I was crazy."

He said that when he began implementing the change in approach last year, he noticed a marked increase in enthusiastic participation by campers. Zantay said he, himself, had to change.

"I used to chase the long-haired ones around and give them haircuts," he recalled. "If I tried that now, their parents would sue me."

Especially popular with Deerwood campers is bicycle riding, Zantay said. The camp owns several bikes, and campers are encouraged to bring their own.

Wahconah-Potomac Camp on Pontoosuc Lake, Pittsfield, has its normal enrollment of 250 boys and girls, according to director Sam Pace, although he said there are fewer 5-to-7-year-olds this year.

He said he is not sure of the reason, but agreed with Zantay about the sophistication of campers.

"We're having fewer problems with homesickness than ever before," he noted. "These kids want to come to camp and can handle being away from home. They're a great bunch."

Mrs. Edward L. Mann Sr., an owner of 50-year-old Camp Half Moon, also on Lake Buel, theorizes that many children are not being sent to camp, especially at early ages, because of changes in family life.

I think more families want to vacation together these days," she said. "During the year, families tend to be apart; each member is involved in one thing or another, and they're just not together much. They figure that during the summer is when they can be together, so some of them don't get sent to camp."

The specialty camps continue to do well. Typical is Fokine Ballet Camp on the former Morgan estate in Lenox, where the 115-girl enrollment is "slightly up," according to Miss Christine Fokine.

Kingsmont Trim-Down (weight-losing) Camp for Boys, which moved to the old Silver Birch Camp in West Stockbridge over the winter from Loch Sheldrake, N.Y., has 221 boys, which is capacity.

Director Richard Rohrbacher, a West Point graduate, while lauding the Berkshires as an attractive camping area, said much of Kingsmont's success stems from what it gives its campers, who arrive chubby and, hopefully, leave lighter.



Schweitzer
SUMMER SEASON is in full swing at camps throughout the Berkshires. Edwin S. Ulanoff of Crane Lake had experienced several slow seasons. History, culture