

December 2009

Gary's Camping Newsletter

Continuous Improvement for Great Camp Leaders

(Add free subscriptions for any staff or volunteer at www.garyforster.com)

Please send comments and submissions to: gary@garyforster.com

This e-mail is easiest to read in HTML, Outlook and other e-mail programs' default setting.)

Do It Now – Would it be worth half a day of your time to get 50 to 100 more kids signed up for camp *before* Christmas? Yes or no? – Jeff Merhige (Camp Kern, OH), Steve Heiny (Flat Rock, IN), and I were kicking around an idea a couple years ago about how we could “feed” one of the fastest growing segments in the “Word of Mouth” sales force: moms getting help from **grandparents** to pay for camp. It's been growing for years, but camps have been doing NOTHING to make it easier. Jeff jumped on it first with “The Perfect Gift” (look for the gift icon at <http://www.campkern.org/>). Kern drove traffic to the site with e-mails to moms suggesting “Has Grandma and Grandpa asked what they can give your camper for Christmas? Send them this link as a suggestion.” Kern had 150 “gifts” given the very first year! Steve's turn was next with a series of postcards to moms throughout the spring with that same message, a great photo, and clever caption. Reach him at sheiny@indymca.org

“When I count my blessings, I count you twice.” —*Irish Proverb*

Job Fair Secret Weapon – I asked Scott “Buddha” Robertson (Detroit Y's Camp Ohiyesa) to share this: “My wife wanted to join me on the road, so we brought our then 5-year-old daughter, too. Not only did she help us get a great booth location, complimentary food and beverage brought to us every 15 minutes, but she managed to bring in every presenter and student at the fair! I had 57 people apply and hired 4 great staff for the OE and Summer Camp Season.” – srobertson@ymcametrodetroit.org

Do You Hear an Echo? – “In September, Camp Echo put together a volunteer evening phone-a-thon to thank our largest donors from the past year and tell them what a great summer we had, due in no small part to their generosity. The response from our donors was amazing. We called 261 individuals in less than 3 hours with 5 of us from our Alumni and Development committee. I had prepared a script for nervous volunteers to leave on answering machines. Donors were amazed that we were just calling to say “Thank You”, not asking for money. Some sent checks in the next week anyway. Many of the folks we talked with shared great stories about their connections to camp which we captured and put into our database for future reference. Numerous donors mentioned they had never received a phone call like this. The best part of the whole evening was how much the volunteers enjoyed making the calls. It was a great confidence builder for them and they are now excited about calling on these same donors during our annual campaign.” -- Katie Trippi, McGaw YMCA Camp Echo, Alumni and Development Director, 847-475-7400 x 226

This Newsletter's Reincarnation generated a LOT of feedback. For a roll in the good-karma pile, take a look at <http://www.garyforster.com/november.php> . Thanks to all of you.

Going Gaga – “I very much enjoyed both of your sessions at November's YMCA Key Leaders conference. I've been a board member and volunteer for Mystic Lake Camp for over thirty years. I was a camper and counselor there back in the 1940's. A couple of years ago Ricky Wright came back from one of your conference talks and said we needed a Ga-Ga pit at camp. I had never heard of one but some web

surfing showed many models from all over the world. I found a site showing kids having a grand time with a Ga-Ga pit made up of 2"x6" planks just staked in the ground. (Print out Gary's drawings and rules at <http://www.garyforster.com/library.php>). With 2 foot high walls even the smallest kids can step over, and the benches on top are a good height for sitting and talking to friends. Several of our pits are on paved surfaces so we put 2"x4" lifts around the bottom so it's easy to sweep sand and dirt from the pit. (Now THAT's clever! – Gary). The eight foot sections are easy to prefab and transport. Fun and friends for under \$200." – Bill Turney, Lansing MI

Spiritual Retreats in Nature –John Lionberger is a minister/author/trip-leader at www.renewalinthewilderness.org and has a book of the same name, subtitled "A Spiritual Guide to Connecting with God in the Natural World." As the leaders of our profession, our staff look to us for inspiration. John gives you some new ways to find meaning in the magic that surrounds us. We can't waste the opportunity. (Thanks to Phil Landers of the UCC)

The Ultimate Camp Resource Guy – Chris Pallatto, exec of the Wheeler Regional Y in CT, says, "Check this out (my own self-promoting!) - <http://www.amazon.com/Summer-Camp-Handbook-Classics-Capture/dp/1402749120>." Parents needing some extra help in preparing for camp can order this inexpensive (and fun) book directly from Amazon.

Web Sites of the Month

- <http://www.camptimberlane.ca/index.php> Just beautiful
- This site shows the depth available with well-executed web design (click to see the *counselors*, too!): http://www.kieve.org/wavus_girls/staff.php (My brother-in-law is board co-chair here). This is a summer camp; most of these quality staff are seasonable.

"I Got a Guy" – Mark Scoular writes, "A group of camp directors met at Camp Kern last month to share ideas, including improving our purchasing power by sharing the names of great vendors, like Tom Madeyski did with his brochure printer several years ago. As a result I took Camp Y-Noah's brochure to my local printer who is very competitive (saved me over \$4,000 my first year). Y-Noah received a quote that will save them \$3,400 on their run of 15,000 brochures! Our printer is www.colortechprint.com 812-423-1000. (Please let our contact Bryan Magnus know you heard about them from Camp Carson!)" -- scoular@ymca.evansville.net

Need Winter Camp Activities? – Still the best place for craft ideas, <http://familyfun.go.com/crafts/> is the online version of Disney's "Family Fun Magazine." You'll find seasonal crafts, things for kids to cook, and activities that take advantage of winter and many holiday traditions.

As for Summer Crafts – as soon as you know who your next craft director will be, I'd give them an assignment of sending you a monthly update on proposed craft activities they've collected from <http://familyfun.go.com/crafts/> and others. The positive interaction between the two of you at least once a month will generate a lot of pre-camp preparation s/he'll see as a fun break from school, and you'll develop an open working relationship where it's safe to share ideas and problem solve. (Like, "Where do you think we could get the clay flower pots for that project donated from? How can we use as many natural materials as possible so the campers spend more time really getting to know camp, and

have better stories to share when they take their projects home?" Guided discovery is a great way for you to gently lay out your expectations, while leaving lots of room for your staff person's own creativity.

"Anything, everything, little or big, becomes an adventure when the right person shares it." —

Kathleen Norris

Looking for a Christmas Gift for a Staff Member ? – You've still got time to give a book. It shows you really appreciate their efforts and care about their future. (Write a nice inscription on the first page.) Amazon.com can have them shipped to you in just a couple days. (Much "greener" than driving around town.) Print out my suggested reading list at <http://www.garyforster.com/library.php> .

"Joy is not in things, it is in us." – Richard Wagner

Celebrating Faith, Hope, and Family –
Happy Chanukah and Merry Christmas!

Gary

Gary Forster, LLC

"Camp Solutions for Great Camp Leaders"

What am I doing now? Take a look: www.garyforster.com