

# Whispering Pines



**HAYO-WENT-HA CAMPS**  
Arbutus Lake for Girls • Torch Lake for Boys  
State YMCA of Michigan



JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2025

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## Musings and Meanderings...

*By John (JC) Carlson, CEO*

**Happy New Year! 2024 Year in Review:**  
Building Momentum for the Future

As we welcome 2025, my first year with Hayo-Went-Ha Camps draws to a close. It's been a year full of challenges, triumphs, and growth, and I'm truly grateful to be part of this unique and vibrant community. From the very start, the generosity and support from our staff, volunteers, alumni, and campers has been extraordinary. Their unwavering commitment is what makes this place so special. Looking back on 2024, I'm proud of the progress we've made. While the pace was fast, stepping back now, it's clear how much we've accomplished. We're not just maintaining — we're thriving, thanks to the passion and dedication of everyone involved. With this strong foundation, we're poised for an exciting 2025 and beyond. Here are five momentum builders that we're excited to share:

### **#1: Financial Sustainability: Strengthening Our Foundation**

In 2024, we took monumental steps toward securing the future of Hayo-Went-Ha Camps, laying a strong financial foundation for generations to come. The incredible generosity of our community fueled the success of the Summer Dreams campaign, providing nearly \$250,000 in scholarship assistance to more than 135 children, ensuring that youth from all backgrounds could experience the transformative power of camp.

Our Keepers of the Flame year-end campaign further fortified critical investments in our programs, operations, and facilities, making certain that Hayo-Went-Ha Camps will continue to be a place where young people thrive, grow, and create lasting memories.

We are deeply grateful to our community for joining us in this journey of legacy, helping to shape a future where the camp experience remains a cornerstone of personal growth and connection for many years to come. Together, we are ensuring that Hayo-Went-Ha Camps will endure as a place of inspiration and impact for generations of youth.

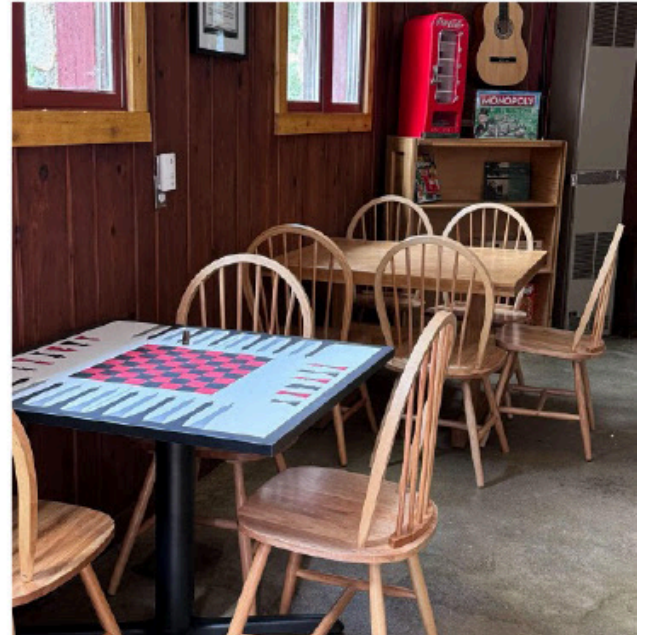
### **#2: Innovative, High-Quality Programs: Laying the Groundwork for Growth**

In 2024, we launched the *Pathways to Growth* framework, a key initiative focused on the long-term development of our campers. This program builds year after year, offering transformative challenges and life skills, all while ensuring that FUN is at the heart of every experience. Central to this journey is our partnership with parents, as we work together to nurture resilience, self-discovery, and lasting relationships — qualities forged through exciting wilderness adventures that challenge campers in meaningful ways. Through this collaboration, we help them develop leadership, teamwork, and perseverance.

Looking ahead to 2025, we're also excited to introduce the W.I.L.D.E.R. Certification Program (Wilderness Institute for Leadership Development & Expedition Readiness), designed to further enhance our staff's wilderness leadership skills and ensure the best possible experiences in the wild.

### **#3: Facilities: Strategic Upgrades and Ongoing Improvements**

In 2024, we made significant progress in enhancing our facilities, taking key steps toward bringing our Master Site Plan to life. Our focus was first on updating and maintaining existing structures to elevate the overall camp experience. Notable upgrades included renovations to Bonbright Lodge at Torch, and the Hayo-Went-Ha Room which was made possible by a generous donation from the Piraino family in memory of Tom Piraino. We also constructed a new Division Leader Cabin at Happy Hollow and expanded the dining space at Arbutus Lake. One of the most exciting developments was the approval of new bathhouses at both camps, set for completion by June, which will significantly enhance the experience for all visitors. With plans to renovate and upgrade our Wilderness Trip Centers at both camps, we're committed to ensuring that every aspect of the camps are aligned with our vision for the future. These improvements reflect our ongoing dedication to being responsible stewards of the resources entrusted to us.



#### **#4: Staff and Volunteer Development: Empowering a Strong Team**

A standout achievement in 2024 has been the growth and strength of our staff and volunteer networks. I've had the privilege of working alongside a remarkable leadership team, strengthened by key promotions such as Gina Georgiou to Director of Wilderness Experience, Amanda Macaluso to Director of Alumni & Community Development, and Erin Steffen to Director of Business Operations & Engagement. We also welcomed new hires, including Mackenzie "MackMo" Morison as Director for Girls Camp, Josh Moody as Assistant Director for Boys Camp, and Beth Putz as our Office Manager & Bookkeeper. Adam Delezenne had an exceptional first year leading Boys Camp and is eager to build on that success in year two. Scott Swanson, our Director of Building, Grounds, & Hospitality, along with Maintenance Director Jake Smith, are helping to elevate our facilities to new heights. The enthusiasm from our Board, alumni, and community members has been truly inspiring. Their time, energy, and expertise have been vital in propelling Hayo-Went-Ha Camps forward, and I'm deeply grateful for their commitment. It's an honor to work alongside such a passionate and dedicated group.





*The Robinson Family has been coming to Family Camp for 30 straight years.*

#### **#5: Cultivating Relationships: Strengthening Community Ties**

In my first year as CEO, I focused on building relationships within our community, connecting with donors, parents, alumni, and campers. Highlights include hosting a family camp at Torch Lake, a memorable 120th/110th alumni reunion, and engaging work weekends — all of which have helped strengthen our ties. Additionally, the formation of a more structured Alumni Committee and the launch of the Each for All Alumni Network has been exciting, and I look forward to seeing this group continue to grow and engage.

#### **Looking Ahead: A Bright Future for 2025 and Beyond**

2024 has been a year of remarkable momentum, and with your continued support, we are poised to achieve even greater things in 2025. Our focus will be on completing key infrastructure projects, expanding our programs, and strengthening our leadership team to ensure that Hayo-Went-Ha Camps remains a place where kids can grow, lead, and thrive. As I reflect on my first year as CEO, I'm deeply grateful for the generosity and unwavering support of our community — especially our campers. Like the three campers pictured below, proudly sporting their Torch Lake Monster T-shirts, their love for adventure and creating memories is a constant source of inspiration for us all. I'm excited to build on the strong foundation we've laid together, and I can't wait to see what we'll accomplish in 2025 and beyond. Thank you for everything you do!



## Mission *Momentum*

### Keepers of the Flame: A Powerful Finish to 2024

*By Amanda Macaluso, Director of Alumni and Community Development*

The 2024 Keepers of the Flame campaign was an outstanding success, and we extend our heartfelt thanks to all of our supporters. Your generosity, enthusiasm, and unwavering commitment have been truly inspiring. This year's new peer-to-peer initiative brought an unprecedented level of engagement, and together we raised an incredible \$311,691 from over 311 donors. Your collective efforts not only exceeded our goals but also ensured a bright future for our camps and the generations of campers to come.

Special congratulations to the winning team, *Ghosts of Camp Past, Present, and Yet to Come*, who raised the most support and connected with 22 individual donors. A special shoutout to Jim Austin, whose engaging posts and nostalgic camp photos brought our community together and helped drive the team to success.

**We also want to recognize all of our team leaders and participants for their incredible efforts:**

- 2024 Arbutus Staff spearheaded by Emma Macaluso and Bronwon Dingamen
- 2024 Torch Staff spearheaded by Tristan Dougans and Josh Moody
- Bob Ulrich – Team Ulrich
- Casey Robinson and Julie Witten– Frog Races and an Upsidedown Sailboat
- Chris Holter – Our Piney Wood Hills - Arbutus Alums
- Katie Sulau – Circle Game
- Dave Foley – Canoe Expert
- Doug Vahey – Hayo Went Ha Hokey Pokey
- Jim Austin – Ghosts of Camp Past, Present, and Yet to Come
- John Kelley – Happy Campers
- Lawrence LeBlond – Order of the Black Kettle
- Matt Carlson and Andy Carlson– Food Grubbers Anonymous
- Meg Dyer – Dyer Dames
- Megan Donahue - Hayo-Went-Ha Team New York
- Mimi Dyer – Cincinnati Campers
- Pat & Dani Morris – Team Boathouse
- Patrick Rode – Team Rode
- Rex Sessions and Gabe Marinaro – Chicago Fire
- Hadley Robinson – My Camp Family
- Sal Cracchiolo and Mike Dunham – Mike Dunham
- Trevor Emig – Camps, Shorts and Dockside Memories

This first-ever team-based campaign has been a tremendous success, and we hope to count on your continued support next year to keep the flame burning. Hayo-Went-Ha Camps are stronger, brighter, and better because of you. Thank you again for being an essential part of this journey.



## Torch Talk

*By Adam Delezenne, Torch Lake Director*

### Introducing the Pathways to Growth

For those of us who know camp well, it can be difficult to explain to those who haven't yet had the experience. Describing the trips, the friendships forged on the trail, or the fun times on the lake often falls short of capturing the true essence of camp. While these aspects are part of it, camp is much more. Those of you who have been campers or have sent your children to our camps know firsthand how transformative the experience can be — you've seen the changes in yourself or your family, both immediately after a summer at camp and years down the road.

This challenge of conveying the full depth of the camp experience led us to discover the Pathways to Growth. This isn't a new concept — in fact, it's been with us all along. Campers and their families have been following these pathways for over a century.

At the starting point of this journey are the tangible elements that define our camps: the trips, the lakes, our two single-gender camps, our unplugged program, roofball, paddleboarding, and so much more. These simple elements guide us along the path, with markers that indicate we're heading in the right direction: campers who develop empathy, push their limits, and cultivate resilience in the face of challenges.

The Pathways to Growth begin during your first summer at camp, but their impact often reveals itself only after years or even decades. You recognize it when you look back and realize that the journey, sparked at camp, has taken you to extraordinary places.

### **Where You Discover Your Place in the World**

Experiences of challenge, tackled as a team, help us understand how we relate to others. Campers, alongside their counselors and leaders, build relationships in diverse groups, navigating conflicts, celebrating victories, and learning what it truly means to care for people from different backgrounds and perspectives.

### **Where You Find True Connection**

Camp offers a necessary break from the constant, shallow connections of smartphones and social media. Campers have the chance to practice face-to-face interactions, build empathy, and connect with others across differences. The time spent away from screens helps young people return home with a healthier relationship to technology and a stronger sense of balance.

### **Where You Become Your Best Self**

When campers arrive at our Torch Lake or Arbutus Lake sites, they step outside the expectations of home and school. New experiences and skills allow them to try new ways of relating to others and understanding themselves. By overcoming adversity, connecting with cabin mates and counselors, exploring the natural world, and discovering who they are becoming, campers develop grit and resilience.

### **Where You Learn to Lead with Empathy**

Leadership in challenging situations, especially with people who have different experiences and perspectives, is an essential skill in today's diverse, fast-paced world. At camp, campers learn the impact they have on those around them and how to manage their emotions with patience and understanding.

As a parent, these are some of my greatest hopes for what my children will carry with them into adulthood. Our programs are intentionally challenging, and our campers experience discomfort and adversity — but it's always within a supportive environment. Growth happens at the intersection of challenge and support, and that's what makes a summer at Hayo-Went-Ha Camps an experience you can't afford to miss.

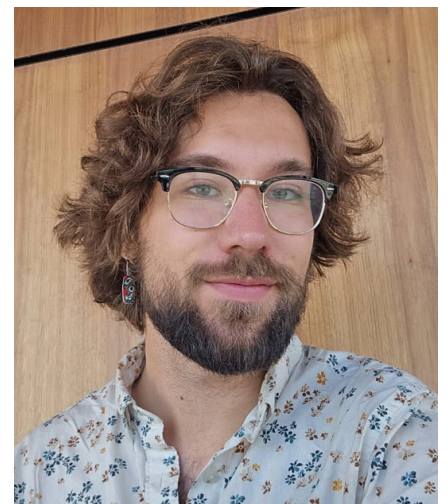


## A Message From Your "New" Assistant Camp Director at Torch Lake

*By Josh Moody, Assistant Camp Director of Camp Hayo-Went-Ha on Torch Lake*

During my first week as Torch Lake's Assistant Director, the theme of finding pathways to growth was emphasized in our effort to create a memorable summer. In discussions about fostering growth for our campers, staff, and the camp itself, I was struck by the parallels to my own transition away from the school I had worked at for the past year.

For context, I had been an elementary school librarian before accepting this role. As part of my departure, I faced the difficult task of informing a group of devoted children that Mr. Moody would no longer be in the library when they returned from break. For three days, I wrestled with how to deliver this news in a way they would understand. And then it hit me: *Growth*.





Here's what I told the students during their final library sessions with me:

“Hi, friends! I have some important news to share. Do you know what happens when you finish first grade? Yes, you move on to second grade! This is because, as we grow, we learn new things and face new challenges. When you leave this school, you'll go on to the intermediate school. Well, as adults, we don't go to new schools, but we do find new jobs that challenge us and help us continue to grow. That's what Mr. Moody will be doing in the New Year — taking on a new role that will help me learn and try new things.”

This sparked a series of questions, which I was happy to answer. But it also got me thinking more deeply about the message I was sharing with them. By accepting the opportunity at Hayo-Went-Ha Camps, I was opening myself to new experiences and challenges, just like the students who move on to the next stage in their education. In life, as in education, we must actively seek new ways to grow into the people we aspire to be. I feel incredibly fortunate to join a team that is helping hundreds of campers grow and reach new heights this summer.



## Arbutus *Angle*

By Mackenzie “MackMo” Morison, Director of Girls Camp on Arbutus Lake

**Embracing the Pathways to a Transformative Summer**

As we talk about the *Pathways to Growth* and think about creating the best summer yet for our campers, I've been reflecting on the growth that happens at camp—particularly, my own journey here.

In 2006, I was specially selected from my Outdoor Ed program to join the camp community because I had started to emerge from my shell. Later, camp experiences would push me further and teach me resilience (yes, I WAS the strongest person in my ninth grade class — who else had spent two weeks hiking on Isle Royale?).

My time at camp, both as a camper and a counselor, made me more confident in the 'Real World' outside of summer camp. I went from walking down the hallways reading a book in school to joining Greek life in college, putting myself out there and seeking new experiences — things I never would have had the courage to do before my time here.

When I think about the pathways we take in life, 6th grade stands out as a true turning point for me — the moment when my path diverged. I picked up the map Hayo-Went-Ha Camps gave me, and followed it: from being a camper from 2007-2009, to becoming an LC, then a summer camp counselor, and later an Outdoor Ed staff member. Today, I'm proud to serve as the new Director at Arbutus Lake. This map has been a guide, allowing me to step off at various points to learn from new experiences, other camps, and people along the way. Eventually, I returned to Hayo-Went-Ha, ready to bring back everything I had learned and use it on this journey.

So many campers and staff can say the same: I would not be who I am today without my time at camp. The growth opportunities here are unmatched, and they're an experience that can't be found anywhere else.

Looking ahead to this summer, I'm most excited about witnessing our staff and campers experience their own transformative moments. We often talk about bringing 'camp magic' into our summers, and I truly believe Hayo-Went-Ha Camps have a unique ability to create those moments in a way few other places can. I'm thrilled to play a role in making that magic happen on Arbutus Lake this summer.



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## Hayo-Went-Ha Camps Happenings

*By Amanda Macaluso, Director of Alumni Development and Community Engagement*

### The First Annual Trivia Night: A Huge Success!

The inaugural Trivia Night was overall a great event! Held at HearSay in Ann Arbor, it brought together 38 enthusiastic participants across six competing teams, each showcasing a unique mix of members.

A young staff team, comprised of Ann Arbor resident's home for the holidays, brought youthful energy to the competition. Another UM college student and camp staff member rallied her housemates for a strong showing, while the Ratcliff family who has only had a camper at HWH for one year — and already signed up for his second year — welcomed alum Brad Semmens to help with camp questions.

The Austin family team, dubbed "Team Cabin 14," was an inspiring group consisting of Jim, Louise, Brian, Katie, Anna, and four Austin grandchildren, who were brimming with excitement and competitive spirit. John Kelley deserves a special shout-out for rallying three other couples to form a team, many of whom had no previous connection to HWH Camps. Board member Bob Ulrich joined John to assist with camp-related questions, adding to the camaraderie.

The silent auction raised \$310, and while space constraints made showcasing items challenging, the effort still resonated with attendees. Generous donations for the silent auction came from Bellaire Youth Initiative, Oriana, Cherry Republic, Short's Brewing, John U. Bacon, and items from both camp stores. Additionally, the event QR code facilitated three online donations totaling \$285, adding to the night's impact.

The trivia questions sparked lively discussions, though there was a notable "flag on the field" for a disputed answer, which was ultimately ruled incorrect. The competition was fierce, with the event culminating in a tie between "Team Four Two: FORT SUMTER" (the college kids) and "Hayo Ya Want To Win" (John Kelley's team). However, amidst the rush to pack up for the next event, a recount revealed the actual winners — **Team Cabin 14: The Austin Family Team!**

A heartfelt thank you goes out to everyone who attended, especially Board Members John Kelley and Bob Ulrich, for their support. While this was a small fundraiser, it was a big win for community engagement. We have conducted an evaluation of the event to identify improvements for next year.

Overall, the first annual Trivia Night was a memorable evening filled with fun, laughter, and connection. Here's to even greater success in the future!





Team Cabin 14: The Austin Family Team!

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## Alumni Spotlight: Mollie Foster

By Hadley Robinson

CAMP ERA: Family Camper/Girls Camper 1989-2002

*Mollie Foster was a long time family camper and did many trips as a camper at Arbutus HWH. We overlapped for most of it, but had mostly lost touch after leaving camp. In 2017, I was in Alaska for a family trip and wanted to spend some extra time backpacking and checking out Denali National Park. I learned Mollie lived there, and reached out. An epic backcountry adventure, including grizzlies and a wolf, ensued. Thank goodness Mollie was there to guide me! Mollie lives the outdoor adventure dream that many of us camp alumni can only aspire to, and I am eager to highlight her work!*

**Question: What's your job?**

Answer: My husband and I own and operate [Traverse Alaska](#), a custom-guiding outfit based out of Denali Park, Alaska. We're going into our 13th year operating. All of our trips are private, meaning only people who know each other (families, couples, groups of friends), and they are customized for each group. We provide hiking, backpacking, rafting and packrafting trips across Alaska.

Being a small business owner, I wear a lot of hats. Throughout the winter I run our bookings, marketing, sales, behind-the-scenes operations, hiring, and other tasks in preparation for our summer season. In the summer (May-September), I split my time between administrative office work, operations, scheduling and helping manage our small team of guides, and leading and guiding some trips myself.

**Q: Why did you decide to start your own business?**

A: My husband Joe Meyer started Traverse Alaska in 2013 and I helped with background support from the beginning, but officially started helping full-time a few years later. Traverse Alaska was founded because of a need for more personalized trips. There are many outfits in the travel industry that are made for large groups of people who don't know each other, or bus loads of people. We wanted to start something that is a more intimate experience and guests experience the Alaska trip they are looking for.

**Q: What's a recent accomplishment you're most proud of?**

A: I am proud of what we've built and how we've grown the business. Running a small business takes a ton of work and dedication, and I'm proud of our team of professional Alaskan guides we've had join our team, the trips themselves, the experience for our guests, and our place in the local Denali community. We've been intentional about the growth of the business, and conscious about keeping the size small, in order to provide excellent service, and create a fun lifestyle for all the staff involved to keep loving what we do.

**Q: How has camp influenced your work and your life?**

A: Camp helped me break out of my shell in my youth. I was a shy kid growing up, and the summers going to camp and spending time with my peers really helped me gain confidence and grow into the person I am today. I still think back on some of the camp trips — biking in the Upper Peninsula or backpacking in Isle Royale — and learning to push myself physically and mentally, which is something I still seek out to this day. I may not live in Alaska if it weren't for camp pushing me into outdoor adventures and growing to love the natural world. I definitely wouldn't be a professional in the outdoor industry without my experience at camp.

**Q: Do you have a favorite camp memory you could share?**

A: Too many memories to list here! I remember getting a huge blister on my heel (still the largest blister I've ever had) during our backpacking trip on Isle Royale and how much of a challenge that was, but I pushed through, with the support of my friends and counselors.

At Family Camp I have fond memories of all of the games — roofball, four square, Polar Bear swims in the morning — and I still have a love of these games to this day.

I'm also thankful for the recent memories, staying in touch with friends from camp and having them visit us in Alaska. Going backpacking with Hadley Robinson (singing camp songs to alert the bears to our presence) in Denali National Park, or skiing in a cross-country ski race in Anchorage with Betsy (Defries) Craske, and other camp connections and friends around the world. The connections I've made at camp last a lifetime — and I am so thankful.

*To learn more and stay in touch:*

[traversealaska.com](http://traversealaska.com)

<https://www.instagram.com/traversealaska/>

<https://www.facebook.com/TraverseAlaska/>

<https://www.instagram.com/mollieofdenali>



# Preserving Camp's Legacy: The Legacy Tree Endowment Initiative

At HWH Camps, we cherish our past while looking ahead to a strong and sustainable future. That's why we are excited to introduce the Legacy Tree Endowment Initiative —a long-term program dedicated to ensuring the financial stability of our camps while honoring those who have helped shape our community.

As a meaningful tribute to those who make a lasting impact, a Legacy Tree will be planted in honor of individuals who establish an endowment fund or include HWH Camps in their estate plans. These trees will serve as living symbols of generosity, ensuring that the spirit of giving continues to grow within camp's natural landscape for generations to come.

For families with deep ties to HWH Camps, we are also offering a special opportunity to purchase a commemorative tree in their family's name.

## **The cost is \$5,000 and includes:**

- A beautifully planted tree
- A customized commemorative plaque
- A contribution to the Legacy Tree Endowment Fund, securing long-term support for camp
- \$4,000 of each contribution will be a direct donation after expenses

We are thrilled to announce that the Legacy Tree Endowment Fund was officially established on January 1, 2025, with an initial \$10,000 contribution from Tom Bartley. Tom's generosity and vision have been instrumental in bringing this initiative to life. His love for HWH Camps, combined with a desire to honor his family history and commemorate his brothers, inspired his leadership in this effort. His father served as State Y President in the late 70's and early 80's, and he and his brothers shared unforgettable summers as campers and counselors in the 1960s.

## **The Legacy Tree Endowment Initiative is designed to provide lasting financial stability for HWH Camps:**

- 4% of annual endowment earnings will be allocated directly to camp operations.
- The fund will be managed by Charles Schwab in a diversified investment portfolio to ensure sustainable growth and responsible stewardship.

This initiative not only helps preserve camp traditions but also secures the future of our programs — ensuring that countless young campers will continue to experience the transformative magic of HWH Camps for years to come.

**To learn more about the Legacy Tree Endowment Initiative or to participate in this special program, please contact:**

- **Amanda Macaluso** – [amacaluso@hayowentha.org](mailto:amacaluso@hayowentha.org)
- **John "JC" Carlson** – [jcarlson@hayowentha.org](mailto:jcarlson@hayowentha.org)

Together, we can grow a legacy that lasts a lifetime.

**“Wear” in the World Are Our Alumni?**



*Sophie B in New Zealand*



*Matt and Annie Squire  
in India*



*Clara in Iceland*



*Daniel W. at  
Walt Disney World*

## Camper Referral Program

Did you know that more than 80% of our campers join us because of referrals from families like yours? As we gear up for Summer 2025, we need your help to spread the word about the life-changing experiences at YMCA Hayo-Went-Ha Camps!

From lifelong friendships to confidence-building adventures, camp is a place where kids grow, explore, and thrive — and you can help introduce new families to this incredible experience.

There are many simple ways to help recruit campers for Summer 2025. You can invite families to one of our [Camp Rally and recruitment events](#), share your own camp experiences and encourage others to visit our website and register, follow us on Facebook and Instagram and share event links with your community, direct families to our website at [www.hayowentha.org](http://www.hayowentha.org), or connect them with our Camp Directors for any questions they may have.

To show our appreciation, we're offering something exclusive to families who help us recruit new campers: a one-of-a-kind 2025 Hayo-Went-Ha flag! For each new camper who registers and mentions you as their referral, you'll receive a 2025 Hayo-Went-Ha Camps flag to proudly display at home. This flag is unique to this year and will serve as a special reminder of the role you played in growing our camp community.

Thank you for helping us share the magic of YMCA Hayo-Went-Ha Camps. Kids need camp now more than ever, and we can't wait to welcome your camper and their friends this summer.

Each for All, and All for Each!





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## Calendar of Events

### MARCH

- 3 – [Birmingham / Bloomfield Hills Rapids Camper Rally](#)
- 4 – [Winnetka Camper Rally](#)
- 5 – [Chicago Camper Rally](#)
- 12 – [Grand Rapids Camper Rally](#)
- 17 – [Traverse City Camper Rally](#)

### Future Newsletter Sections

We want to hear from you! Whether you recently got married, welcomed a future camper into the world, or traveled somewhere amazing while proudly sporting your camp gear, we'd love to share your news with our alumni community. Complete this form to share your updates and photos and we'll be thrilled to share your milestones with camp friends across the U.S. and around the globe!

[Click here](#) for all past editions of the Whispering Pines and some news from alumni. Weddings, Babies, and reunions...

*Please consider forwarding this issue of Whispering Pines to friends, family members and others in your network that might consider making an investment in our camps!*



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State YMCA of Michigan



120 Years



110 Years

**Our Contact Information**

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