Whispering Pines

YMCA HAYO-WENT-HA CAMPS
Two Camps. One Purpose.

April2026

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Musings and Meanderings…

By John (JC) Carlson, CEO

April Momentum: Where Summer Begins

There may still be snow on the ground in Northern Michigan, but behind the scenes at Hayo-Went-Ha Camps, this is crunch time. This is when vision turns into action. Staffing charts fill up, wilderness permits are finalized, camper attendance plans take shape, programs are designed, and the flights to Alaska are booked. It is when we look ahead and realize that another summer is not just coming. It's building daily.

And 2026 is already shaping up to be one of the best yet.

It always starts with leadership.

We are thrilled to welcome Jack LaGoy as our new Torch Hayo-Went-Ha Camp Director. Jack's journey is the story we hope every camper dreams of. He began as a camper, grew into a counselor, stepped into division leadership, served as Assistant Camp Director, and this January stepped into what he calls his dream job. Watching someone rise through the very program that shaped them is powerful. Jack has already hit the ground running, and his energy for the future of camp is contagious. Alongside him, Josh

Moody returns as Assistant Camp Director for his 5th year at camp. This duo brings experience, a deep love for camp, and a shared commitment to excellence that will define the summer.

Mackenzie “MackMo” Morrison, who grew up through the Arbutus Hayo-Went-Ha program herself, returns for her second year as Camp Director at Arbutus Hayo-Went-Ha. Her thoughtful leadership continues to strengthen the program and build on the traditions that make camp so meaningful for our campers and staff. Mackenzie also leads the camp’s social media efforts, using her creativity and understanding of the community to share the spirit of Hayo-Went-Ha Camps with families and alumni throughout the year. Joining her this summer is Bronwen Dingeman, known and loved by campers and staff as “Dink,” who will serve as Assistant Director. Together they bring strong experience, a deep connection to camp, and a shared commitment to creating a summer filled with adventure, growth, and lasting memories.

And this is just the beginning.





Our Pathways to Growth progressive program continues to partner with families year after year, guiding campers through intentional developmental milestones. It’s hard to believe that we are welcoming campers from almost 40 states across the country. Friendships and lifelong bonds are formed from coast to coast.

The stories from last summer still echo, rooted in growth and challenge.

A camper who backpacked for the Porcupine Mountains and discovered resilience they did not know they had. A crew that sailed among the Apostle Islands and learned what it truly means to depend on one another. A group that logged more than 100 miles at Isle Royale, pushing through fatigue and finding strength in shared challenges.

I remember standing in Killarney Provincial Park in Canada and asking one camper how he enjoyed the trip. He paused, looked out over the water, and simply said, “Life changing.”

That is Hayo-Went-Ha Camps in its purest form.

It is challenges overcome. It is friendships forged through shared adventure. It is the raw beauty of the Great Lakes Basin and the vast wilderness of Alaska stretching farther than the eye can see. It is a place where screens are set aside and campers rediscover what it means to be fully present and truly unplugged.

And this year, due to the generosity of our community, we are beginning Phase One of construction on our new Wilderness Adventure Centers. This investment ensures that the next generation of campers will continue to explore, grow, and lead from spaces designed to support transformative outdoor experiences.

March and now into April, our offices may look like spreadsheets, interviews, permits, and planning meetings. But for those of us who have spent decades in this work, it feels more like possibility. It feels like adventure taking shape.

Because when April hits, camp truly comes alive.

And 2026 is going to be extraordinary.



Camp Friends are the Best Friends!

By Ellie Amado Olivo, Meg Dyer, Stewie Campbell, Janie Hurley, Isabel Ratner, Julia Drumm, Olivia Plagens, Katie Burton, and Makenzie Martin

In 2016, a group of Camp Arbutus girls boarded a plane to Alaska, messy buns, matching sweatshirts, and building friendships that would last a lifetime. Together, we completed every wild camp trip, pushed through challenges, and laughed until we cried.

Ten years later, in 2026, we reunited for one of life's most beautiful milestones — celebrating a wedding.

Flights came in from California, New York, Washington, Colorado, Tennessee, Illinois, and Michigan. Different cities. Different careers. Different seasons of life. Yet the connection we built at camp has remained untouched by time or distance.

Built in adventure and strengthened through challenge, our friendships were never meant to be temporary. From Alaska in 2016 to a wedding dance floor in 2026 — proof that camp friends truly last forever.





National Hayo-Hike Day is April 25th

Mark your calendar and join us on Saturday, April 25! Across the country, alumni, families, staff, and friends of HWH Camps will gather to celebrate our love of camp. National Hayo-Hike Day is all about connection, community, and getting outdoors together. It also lines up beautifully with Earth Day and the kickoff of our Summer Dreams Campership Campaign, so it's a meaningful day in more ways than one.

We have Hayo-Hikes in the following 13 locations across the county. More details can be found on the camp website events page, **hayowentha.org/events.**
Ann Arbor, MI
Atlanta, GA
Chicago, IL
Cincinnati, OH
Cleveland, OH
Denver, CO
New York, NY
Portland, OR
Seattle, WA
Washington, DC
YMCA Camp Torch Hayo-Went-Ha
YMCA Camp Arbutus Hayo-Went-Ha
Internationally - Melbourne, Australia



National Hayo-Hike Day is our spring day of connection and purpose. If you don't want to do an official hike or if you are not in one of these 13 locations, you can still participate. You can host something simple with friends, or celebrate camp wherever you are by getting outside and sharing what camp means to you. Every gathering helps strengthen our community.

On April 25, step outside, reconnect, and help a child step into summer. We look forward to celebrating with you. Be sure to send us a photo of your group.

Learn More!

Support the Summer Dreams Campaign here!

Oh the Things Alumni Can Do!

By Hadley Robinson, Alumni Committee Chair

The alumni committee is in its second year, and we're excited about what we have planned for 2026. Last year, we officially launched the **"Each for All Alumni Network."** It's a community platform for alumni that includes a directory, alumni event pages and fun groups where you can share photos or make email lists. As of this writing, we have about 280 alumni signed up, and we are hoping to double that by the end of this year. Make sure to **sign up here** and upload a pic and update your profile if you haven't already.

This year, we're building on some of our most successful projects that began in 2025.

1. Regional Events: You'll read more about our big Hayo-Hike day elsewhere in this newsletter. For context, we had success last year piloting some meet-up walks in several locations. These are opportunities for alumni across generations to get outside and connect over our shared love of Hayo-Went-Ha camps. I personally had a great time at the one we did in the DC area — I saw old friends, met new ones, and my daughter got to romp around the trails with lots of other kids.

These regional events are just the beginning of what I envision as future camp alumni "villages." I want to bring the same sense of community and belonging that so many of us felt at camp to our everyday lives. We can plan hikes or meet-ups to start, but I would love a world where a HWH camps alumnus can move somewhere new and find a built-in multi-generational community; where young professionals can find mentors; where parents can find babysitters; or where people can coordinate getting their kids to and from camp every summer. There's so much we can do, and I truly believe we're just getting started.

2. Our committee has been talking about how we all have "**camp skills for life**" that we developed during our time as campers and staff. Whether we apply those in classrooms, in boardrooms or in our social lives, camp has equipped us with skills to succeed, lead and develop strong relationships. As alumni, we are thinking about how we can help equip our camp staff to be great counselors, but also great leaders throughout their lives. Our committee will help connect alumni with today's young camp leaders, particularly through the LC program and possibly staff training. If you're in northern Michigan in the summer and interested in getting involved, please reach out to me Hadley, **hadsrobinson@gmail.com**, and/or Brad **bradmiddlekauff@mindspring.com**.

3. A comprehensive **alumni songbook** is coming. I get questions pretty frequently from camp friends asking for lyrics or chords, and it's time we provide this resource. We have 100s of songs so far from both sites, and we will whittle those down to something reasonable and make it available online. Do you have any old songbooks hidden away in the attic? Send them my way: **hadsrobinson@gmail.com**.



Alumni Store



For alumni from all years and both camps, we invite you to join the Each for All Alumni platform. It's a great way to reconnect with camp friends, find others in your area, and join groups based on your years at camp or shared interests.

Click here to check it out and update your profile.

PS It's also the only place where you can purchase camp gear featuring the heritage logos from each site. Alumni camp store will be up and running by June 1st!



Operation Spring Spruce Up Work Weekends

Hello and welcome to 2026! Every year we reach out to seek help to get our camps ready for another summer season. Our annual volunteer work weekend now aptly named "Operation Spring Spruce Up", is happening on the following dates.

Torch Lake location • Friday, May 1 – 3
Arbutus Lake location • Friday, May 15 – 17

Each volunteer at the work weekend makes a huge difference in getting our facilities ready for a new season of eager young campers. Plus, it's a great opportunity to rekindle old friendships, forge new ones, and spend time on the grounds of Hayo-Went-Ha Camps.

Since "many hands make light work," we'd are hoping you know other camp families or friends who may be interested to join you. You (and your friend) are welcome to participate for the entire weekend, either weekend or simply contribute a few hours of your time. Either way, your presence would be greatly appreciated!

Accommodations and meals will be provided. For volunteers under 18, we kindly request that a parent or supervising adult accompany them. Meals will be served from Saturday breakfast through Sunday lunch, and work projects will conclude by noon on Sunday.

We look forward to welcoming you to one or both of our camps soon and extend our heartfelt gratitude in advance for your invaluable time and talents.

If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to email:

Scott Swanson, Building and Grounds Director, **sswanson@hayowentha.org**
Jack LaGoy, *Torch Lake Site*, **Jlagoy@hayowentha.org**
Mackenzie (MackMo) Morison, *Arbutus Lake Site*, **mmorison@hayowentha.org**

Register Now!



Looking Ahead: Help Shape the Future of Hayo-Went-Ha Camps

Many members of the Hayo-Went-Ha community have shared a deep interest in supporting the future of the camps we all love. As part of our long-term planning, we are currently conducting a feasibility study to better understand how our community can help guide and support the next chapter of Hayo-Went-Ha Camps

This study will help us gather valuable feedback from alumni, families, donors, and friends of camp. The goal is to listen, learn, and explore ideas that will ensure the camps continue to provide meaningful outdoor experiences for generations of campers to come.



If you are interested in sharing your perspective, learning more about the future vision for camp, or participating in a brief conversation as part of this study, we would love to hear from you.

Please reach out to Amanda - amacaluso@hayowentha.org for more information or to schedule a follow-up conversation. Your voice and insights are an important part of helping shape the future of Hayo-Went-Ha Camps.

Stay in the Loop!

Check out the new events section on the website. Your one-stop place to check all the camp events for the year!

Events Calendar

Camp Connections

Do you know a camp friend who isn't receiving the Whispering Pines newsletter? Have them reach out to Amanda at **amacaluso@hayowentha.org** so they don't miss any updates.

Click here for all past editions of the Whispering Pines and some news from alumni. Weddings, Babies, and reunions…

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