Whispering Pines

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

JULY 2026

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A Historic Announcement & Commitment to the Future of Hayo-Went-Ha Camps

By John (JC) Carlson, CEO

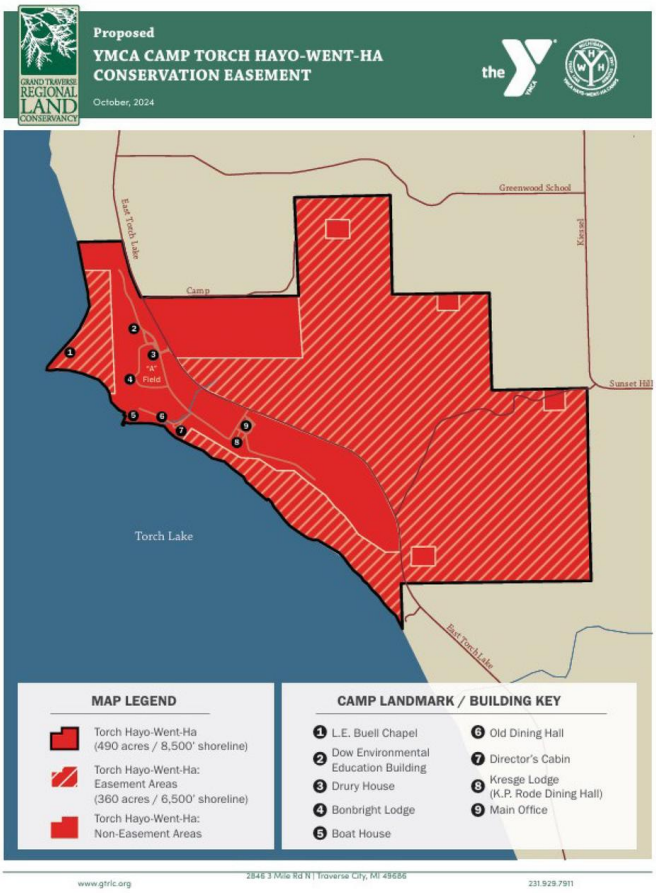
Protect. Preserve. Pass it on.

YMCA Hayo-Went-Ha Camps is proud to announce a historic collaboration with the Grand Traverse Regional Land Conservancy (GTRLC) that will permanently protect 354 acres at our Torch Lake camp.

For more than 100 years, the forests, shoreline, wetlands, and natural beauty of Hayo-Went-Ha Camps have provided the backdrop for life-changing experiences. Through this conservation

easement, we are ensuring that this remarkable landscape will remain protected while strengthening the long-term future of camp.

This partnership is about much more than preserving land. It is about protecting the place that has inspired generations of campers to build confidence, develop leadership skills, form lifelong friendships, and discover a deep connection with nature.







The initiative supports three important priorities.

Protect. The conservation easement creates a board-designated fund that will strengthen the future of YMCA Hayo-Went-Ha Camps by supporting environmental stewardship, preserving both of our historic camps, addressing long-term facility needs, and making strategic investments that ensure future generations can continue to experience the life-changing impact of camp.

Preserve. This commitment preserves 354 acres of forests, shoreline, wetlands, and wildlife habitat, permanently protecting the Torch Lake location from future development and safeguarding the natural environment that has always been at the heart of the HWH Camps experience.

Pass It On. Most importantly, this partnership ensures that future generations of young people will continue to experience the adventure, belonging, personal growth, and lifelong memories that only camp can provide.

This is more than a conservation project. It is a commitment to the future of Hayo-Went-Ha Camps. Together, we are protecting a special place while ensuring that the HWH experience will continue to inspire young people for generations to come.

Pictured from left to right: Joe O'Connell, HWH Camps Task Force Chair; John "JC" Carlson, CEO of YMCA Hayo-Went-Ha Camps; Glenn Chown, Executive Director of the GTRLC; and John Kelley, Chair of the HWH Camps Board of Directors.



Together, we are protecting a special place while ensuring that the Hayo-Went-Ha experience continues to inspire young people for generations to come.

Would you like to learn more?

Click here to read our FAQ information on the website.

We are deeply grateful to the Cook Family Foundation for continuing Bruce Cook's legacy through an extraordinary $2 million commitment to the Conservation Easement, the largest gift in the Foundation's history.

Bruce's connection to Hayo-Went-Ha Camps began as a camper and continued throughout his life through his service, leadership, and generosity. This transformational gift honors that legacy while helping ensure that future generations of young people will continue to experience the confidence, leadership, and belonging that Hayo-Went-Ha provides.

Thank you to the entire Cook Family Foundation for believing in this special place and for helping protect its future for generations to come.

Click here to learn more about the Cook Family Foundation's commitment and the Conservation Easement partnership.





Campfire Across America

This summer, YMCA Hayo-Went-Ha Camps will join Ys from across the country in celebrating Campfire Across America, a national initiative honoring the YMCA's 175th anniversary. On Wednesday, July 22, communities from coast to coast will gather around campfires to celebrate 175 years of belonging, reflection, friendship, and community.

At Hayo-Went-Ha Camps, both Torch Lake Camp, Arbutus Camp, and Day Camp campers will participate in this special evening. For alumni and friends of camp, this is also a wonderful opportunity to reconnect with your camp memories wherever you are. Gather around a fire with family or friends, light a candle on your porch, share a camp song, tell a favorite HWH story, or simply take a quiet moment to reflect on what camp has meant in your life.

Campfires have always represented something bigger at Hayo-Went-Ha Camps. They are places where friendships begin, confidence grows, traditions are passed down, and generations feel connected. For more than 120 years, campfires have brought our community together.

As we celebrate this national moment of celebration and connection, it is also the perfect opportunity to support the Summer Dreams Campership and Equipment Campaign. Every donation helps provide more children with the opportunity to experience camp, build lifelong friendships, unplug from everyday distractions, and discover confidence and a sense of belonging in the outdoors.

If camp has ever made a difference in your life, July 22 is a meaningful day to help create that same experience for another child.

The Y is excited to announce that the Camp Fire initiative will be featured on the Today Show Plaza on July 20, showcasing the impact and importance of camp experiences to a national audience.

Light a fire. Light a candle. Share a memory.

Support a Camper!

Show Us Your Campfire Crew!

Post a photo of you and your friends around your campfire, tag Hayo-Went-Ha Camps, and you'll be entered for a chance to win an HWH Camps hoodie in the color of your choice!

We can't wait to see campfires lighting up across the country!







Running in the Footsteps of Our Founders

On August 6, HWH staff members Helen, Theo, and Henry will lace up their running shoes for a challenge unlike any other. On their day off, they will run the historic Founder's Marathon route from the Alden Train Station to Hayo-Went-Ha Point and back, all to raise campership funds for future campers.

This route is more than just a marathon. It follows the path our three founders walked more than a century ago after stepping off the train in Alden to explore what would become the home of YMCA Camp Torch Hayo-Went-Ha. Their vision, determination, and belief in the power of camp created a place that has transformed the lives of thousands of young people.

Now, Helen, Theo, and Henry are retracing those footsteps with a purpose of their own. Their goal is to raise $100 for every mile they run, helping provide campership support for a child who might not otherwise have the opportunity to experience the friendships, confidence, leadership, independence, and sense of belonging that HWH Camps provides.

Every donation, no matter the amount, helps move them closer to their goal and helps ensure another young person can experience the magic of camp.

You can support the team by making a gift through their Givebutter fundraising page, sharing the campaign with family and friends, and following their journey on social media as they prepare for and complete the challenge.

This run is about much more than miles. It is about honoring our history while investing in the future of Hayo-Went-Ha Camps. It is about carrying forward the founders' vision and ensuring that every child has the opportunity to create memories and friendships that will last a lifetime.

Please join us in cheering on Helen, Theo, and Henry as they take on this incredible challenge. Together, we can help send one more camper to HWH Camps.

Every mile matters. Every gift matters. Every camper matters.

Show Your Support!

Help Us Reach the Summit: Every Child Deserves a Summer at Camp

Every great adventure has a destination, and together we are nearing the summit. Because of the incredible generosity of our alumni, donors, volunteers, and friends, hundreds of young people are experiencing the adventure, friendships, and personal growth that Hayo-Went-Ha Camps uniquely provides.

The Summer Dreams Campership Campaign has raised $286,775 toward our $300,000 goal, bringing us 95% of the way there. Thanks to your support, approximately 145 campers have received campership assistance this summer and have had the opportunity to experience the life-changing impact of camp.

The final stretch of any wilderness journey often requires the greatest commitment and determination. The destination is in sight, and we invite our Hayo-Went-Ha Camps community to help us take those final steps and reach the summit.

Every gift helps ensure another child has the opportunity to paddle a canoe, hike a wilderness trail, sleep under the stars, build lifelong friendships, and discover confidence and belonging.

Thank you for believing that every child deserves a summer at camp.



Please Make Your Gift Today!



Alumni Sailors Return to Camp

One of the most treasured traditions at Hayo-Went-Ha Camps is the connection between past and present generations of campers.

On Wednesday, June 17, we were excited to welcome alumni sailors back to camp for our Alumni Sailing Day.

Throughout the day, alumni volunteers joined our sailing staff on the waterfront to share their knowledge, skills, and love of sailing with today's campers. Beyond teaching sailing techniques, these alumni brought something even more valuable: stories, memories, and a living connection to the generations of campers who sailed the waters of Torch Lake before them.



We are incredibly grateful to alumni volunteers Andrew Mercurio, John Bayldon, and Mike Ericksen for generously sharing their time, expertise, and camp spirit with our campers during Alumni Sailing Day. Their willingness to give back helped strengthen the traditions that make Hayo-Went-Ha so special. Campers had the opportunity to learn from experienced sailors while hearing firsthand stories about camp life from years gone by.

Alumni Sailing Day was a wonderful reminder that while boats, buildings, and programs may change over time, the friendships, leadership, and love of sailing that define Hayo-Went-Ha continue from one generation to the next.

Community Radio: HWH Camp ON AIR

Several campers and staff recently had the opportunity to be interviewed on Elk Rapids Community Radio, and it was a wonderful experience.

Throughout the hour, campers shared stories about life at Hayo-Went-Ha Camps, their favorite activities, and the wilderness trips they completed this summer. Their enthusiasm, humor, and confidence shone through, making for an entertaining and inspiring conversation.

If you missed the live broadcast, you can still listen online. Grab a cup of coffee, sit back, and enjoy hearing these young people reflect on the friendships, adventures, growth, and memories they experienced during their final week of camp.

Click below to find the interview on the Community Conversations page at 997 FM.



Listen to Interview

From Camp Trails to Wilderness Medicine Leadership: HWH Alum Receives 2026 Founders Award

Lawrence LeBlond, MD, MFAWM Earns Recognition with 2026 Founders Award for Wilderness Medicine Leadership.



Lawrence LeBlond, MD, MFAWM, Emergency Physician at Methodist Hospital in Memphis, TN; Clinical Assistant Professor at the University of Tennessee; Adjunct Clinical Faculty at Lincoln Memorial University; Instructor for the Memphis Fire Department; and President of the American Academy of Emergency Physicians, has received the 2026 Founders Award from the Wilderness Medical Society (WMS), one of the field's highest honors recognizing sustained leadership and impact in wilderness medicine. The WMS Founders Award is given annually "in recognition of outstanding contributions to the principles and objectives of the field of wilderness medicine as envisioned by the Society's founders, with demonstrated dedication and ongoing engagement that have served to further the longevity of the WMS."

LeBlond, current chairperson of the WMS's Fellowship in the Academy of Wilderness Medicine (FAWM) and continuing medical education (CME/CE) committees; and member of the WMS's graduate medical education (GME) fellowship certification workgroup, is being recognized for his exceptional leadership of the FAWM certification and CME programs. He has played a pivotal role in advancing the Society's educational mission, driving curriculum innovation while upholding rigorous accreditation standards. His dedication, attention to detail, and hands-on commitment have been essential to sustaining program quality, supporting growth, and achieving successful accreditation across multiple domains. His contributions have had a significant and lasting impact on the organization. "Success belongs to those who came before us and our team who worked to make all things possible." LeBlond said.

The award will be presented at the WMS Summer Conference, July 19-22, 2026, in Asheville, North Carolina.

The Wilderness Medical Society is a global community of medical professionals devoted to facilitating high-quality care in the outdoors. Through education, research, and certification, WMS equips clinicians to practice in any environment on (or off) the planet. For more information, click the button below.

Learn More!

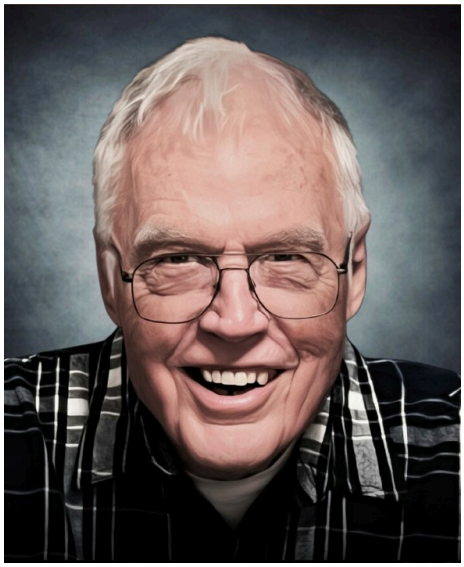
Remembering Matt "George" Janson

The Hayo-Went-Ha Camps family is saddened by the passing of Matt Janson, affectionately known to many as "George," who passed away last Friday at the age of 88.

Matt was a devoted friend and volunteer whose impact on Hayo-Went-Ha Camps will be felt for generations. He served as both a member and chair of the Buildings & Grounds Committee and was a familiar face at countless Work Weekends. Whether operating heavy equipment, tackling major projects, or simply lending a hand wherever it was needed, Matt gave generously of his time, talents, and heart.

What made his commitment especially remarkable was that he had no direct family connection to camp. His love for Hayo-Went-Ha grew through the people he cared about. Camp was important to them, so it became important to him. Over the years, he became one of camp's true champions, quietly helping improve the property so thousands of campers could enjoy a better experience.

Joe O'Connell, who worked alongside Matt for many years, reflected on his legacy by saying, "Matt never looked for recognition. If something needed to be done, he was there with a smile, a strong work ethic, and whatever equipment was needed. He cared deeply about camp and about the people who called it home. His generosity and friendship will never be forgotten."



Matt's family has requested that memorial gifts be made to YMCA Hayo-Went-Ha Camps in his honor. It is a fitting tribute to someone whose generosity helped shape the camp we know today.

We extend our heartfelt condolences to Matt's family and friends. We are grateful for his many years of service, his unwavering commitment, and the lasting legacy he leaves behind.

He will be deeply missed.

Remembering Richard Homlar

The YMCA Hayo-Went-Ha Camps community is saddened by the passing of Richard Homlar, a devoted supporter and treasured member of our camp family.

Richard's connection to Hayo-Went-Ha Camps spanned generations. His sons, Scott and Joe, both attended camp as campers and later served on staff. His daughter-in-law, Rachel, and seven of his grandchildren have also experienced the friendships, adventures, and personal growth that camp provides. Richard believed deeply in the resident camp experience and was a passionate advocate for the lasting impact it has on young people.

Richard's love for camp was reflected not only in his encouragement of his family but also in his steadfast support of our mission. He understood that camp changes lives and believed every child should have the opportunity to experience the confidence, leadership, and sense of belonging that Hayo-Went-Ha Camps inspires.



Many friends and family members have asked how they can honor Richard's memory. At the family's request, memorial gifts may be made to YMCA Hayo-Went-Ha Camps, continuing the mission that meant so much to him and helping future generations of campers create their own lifelong memories.

We extend our heartfelt condolences to Richard's family and friends. We are deeply grateful for his years of friendship, generosity, and commitment to Hayo-Went-Ha Camps. His legacy will live on through the countless lives that will continue to be changed by camp for years to come.

He will be greatly missed.

Remembering Rick Austin

Rick Austin, the first of four generations of Hayo-Went-Ha Camps campers, passed away peacefully on July 11, 2026 at the age of 97.

Rick was a camper from 1937 to 1942. Camp, the relationships he made and the leadership example of Cap Drury and his counselors, helped shape Rick into the wonderful man, father, grandfather and great-grandfather he became.

When interviewed by Pat Rode for On the Sloping Pine Hills, Rick related stories of cricket on the A Field, playing clarinet at chapel, dealing with a mischievous porcupine on the Manistee River, sleeping around a campfire on the beach on the final night of camp, and playing Rain on the Roof (a precursor to Roofball, with a tennis ball on the cabin roof). Rick’s name is prominent in the Boathouse over one of the doors.

Rick went on to success in business with Chrysler Leasing and Kux Manufacturing, and athletic prowess, winning the State Championship in Squash for Michigan in 1965. Rick’s love of camp was passed down to two sons (Bill and Jim), nine grandchildren, and (so far) seven great-grandchildren.

He will be greatly missed, and the Austin family leaves an extraordinary legacy at Hayo-Went-Ha Camps that will continue to inspire generations to come.





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…

the YMCA HAYO-WENT-HA CAMPS
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