Whispering Pines

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

SEPTEMBER 2026

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A Summer Worth Celebrating

By John (JC) Carlson, CEO

As another summer comes to a close, there is so much to celebrate. Across both camps, we saw the magic of Hayo-Went-Ha Camps play out in countless ways: campers discovering what they are capable of, families and alumni reconnecting with the community, and our collective commitment to protecting the places and traditions that make camp possible.

Here are three highlights that capture the heart of our summer:

THE BEST DAY WE HAD

In 2026, we saw that magic in countless ways. From new adventures to unexpected moments, including Canadian wildfire smoke drifting into Michigan, our campers and staff embraced whatever the summer brought their way and did what they do best: **they turned challenging moments into some of the best memories.**

I was reminded of this one evening when I sat down for dinner with a cabin of Killarney campers and asked about their trip. They told me about a particularly challenging portage through a long, muddy section, carrying their canoes above their heads while mosquitoes buzzed around them. As a CEO, I want every camper experience to be perfect. And Killarney is one of the most beautiful and amazing places on Earth. But this certainly didn't sound perfect to me. So I said to the group, "Well, that doesn't sound very fun at all."

Almost in unison, the campers looked at each other and responded, **"That was actually the BEST day we had."**

Why?

As we talked about it, they told me how they helped each other when someone needed it and realized they could overcome something difficult by working together. **But what they valued most was the bond they built with one another by overcoming the challenge together.**

That, to me, is the magic of a Hayo-Went-Ha Camps experience. **The moments that don't go exactly as planned often become the moments campers remember and value most.**

A COMMUNITY OF STRENGTH

The summer of 2026 also reminded us that the strength of Hayo-Went-Ha Camps comes from the community that surrounds it. Through growing partnerships, we helped make camp accessible to more campers than ever before. We welcomed alumni back to reconnect and share their stories, and brought generations of families together through a very meaningful Family Camp. Our Hayo-Homecomings also continued to grow, bringing more than 20 alumni and parents together at each event.

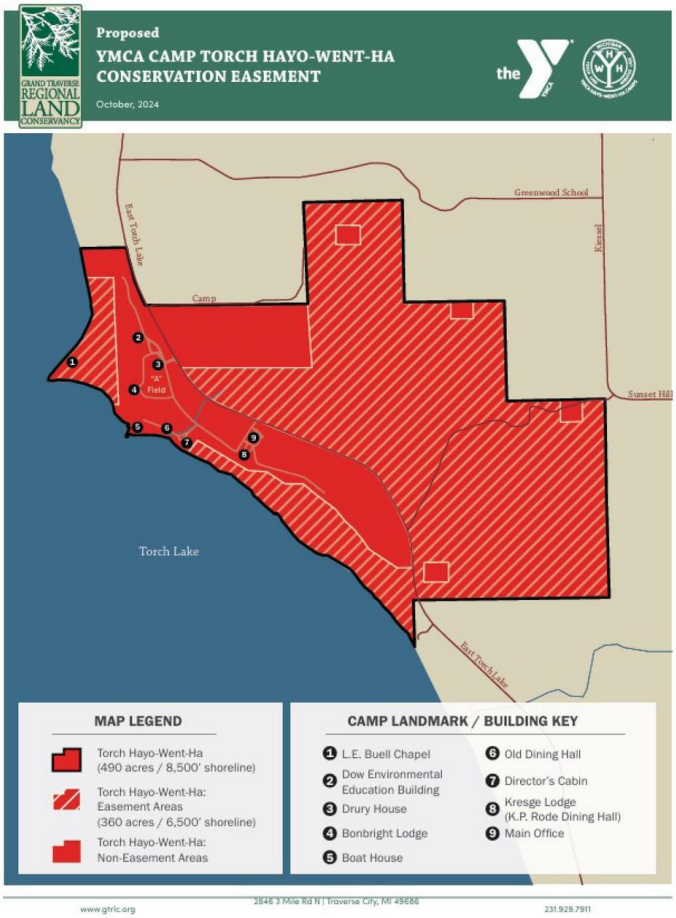


THWH Family Camp 2026

PROTECTING WHAT MATTERS

This summer, we took an important step forward by signing an agreement with the Grand Traverse Regional Land Conservancy to establish a 354-acre conservation easement that, when fully realized, will permanently protect our Torch Lake property. As we look ahead, our Board and staff remain committed to strengthening both camps and ensuring Hayo-Went-Ha Camps continue to thrive.

Together, we have a lot to celebrate, a lot to protect, and an exciting future to build because kids need camp more than ever.







50 Miles in 5 Days: Support Our Paddlers!

This summer, a dedicated team of Hayo-Went-Ha Camps alumni and staff will take on the challenge of paddling and portaging 50 miles through the breathtaking wilderness of Killarney Provincial Park (KPP) — all to raise funds for camperships for the more extensive tripping programs like Isle Royale, Killarney, and Alaska.

Please check out the paddlers below as they introduce themselves and share why they are taking on this challenge. Be sure to follow along, cheer them on, and choose a team member to support!

Support Challenge

Hayo-Went-Ha holds a special place in the hearts of generations of campers and alumni. While this year's 50 Miles in 5 Days adventure takes us back to Killarney, the memories that connect our camp community reach far beyond any one trip or destination. Maybe you remember paddling across a quiet lake, carrying a canoe over a long portage, sleeping under the stars, singing around a campfire, sailing on Torch Lake, hiking a trail, or simply discovering something new about yourself in the outdoors. For some, that adventure was Killarney. For others, it was Isle Royale, Sleeping Bear, South Manitou, Alaska, or a first overnight close to camp.

These experiences are part of what makes Hayo-Went-Ha Camps so special.

Our wilderness trips are also some of our most expensive programs to provide. That is why **50 Miles in 5 Days** is our final campership fundraiser of the summer. As our paddlers take on their Killarney adventure, we invite our entire camp community to celebrate the quest for adventure and help make those same life-changing experiences possible for the next generation.

Here's a fun alumni or community challenge: Consider making a gift based on:

Donate $100 for every KPP trip you have taken.
Donate $25 for every lake you have visited in Killarney.
Donate $15 for every unforgettable KPP memory.
Donate $5 for every mile you had to portage a canoe.
Donate $1 for every paddle stroke you took in the park.
Donate in support of all future campers heading on an extended wilderness adventure.

Together, we can ensure that more young people have the opportunity to experience the personal growth that extended wilderness trips at YMCA Hayo-Went-Ha Camps make possible.

Each for All, All for Each!

Support a Paddler!

Support a Team:



Lily C - **to support click here**



Mary T - **to support Click here**



Emma M - **to support Click here**



Josh M - **to support Click here**



Charlie T - **to support Click here**



Doug V - **to support Click here**



Annalise B - **to support Click here**



Jack L - **to support Click here**



Mimi D - **to support Click here**

A Heartfelt Thank You to Mackenzie Morison

After two years as Director of Camp Arbutus Hayo-Went-Ha, we want to share with our camp community that **Mackenzie "MackMo" Morison** is moving on to her next adventure.

During her time as Director, Mackenzie brought care and commitment to Camp AHWH. She has played an important role in supporting the program, campers, and staff, and in carrying forward the traditions and spirit that make AHWH such a special place.

We are grateful for the time, leadership, and heart Mackenzie has given to Camp AHWH and the many relationships she has built along the way. We wish her all the very best as she begins this next chapter.

Please join us in thanking Mackenzie for her contributions to Camp Arbutus Hayo-Went-Ha and celebrating all that she has been a part of over the past two years.

As we look ahead, **YMCA Hayo-Went-Ha Camps will begin a national search for our next Camp Arbutus Director.**

Calling All AHWH Nejee Alumni:

We Need You!

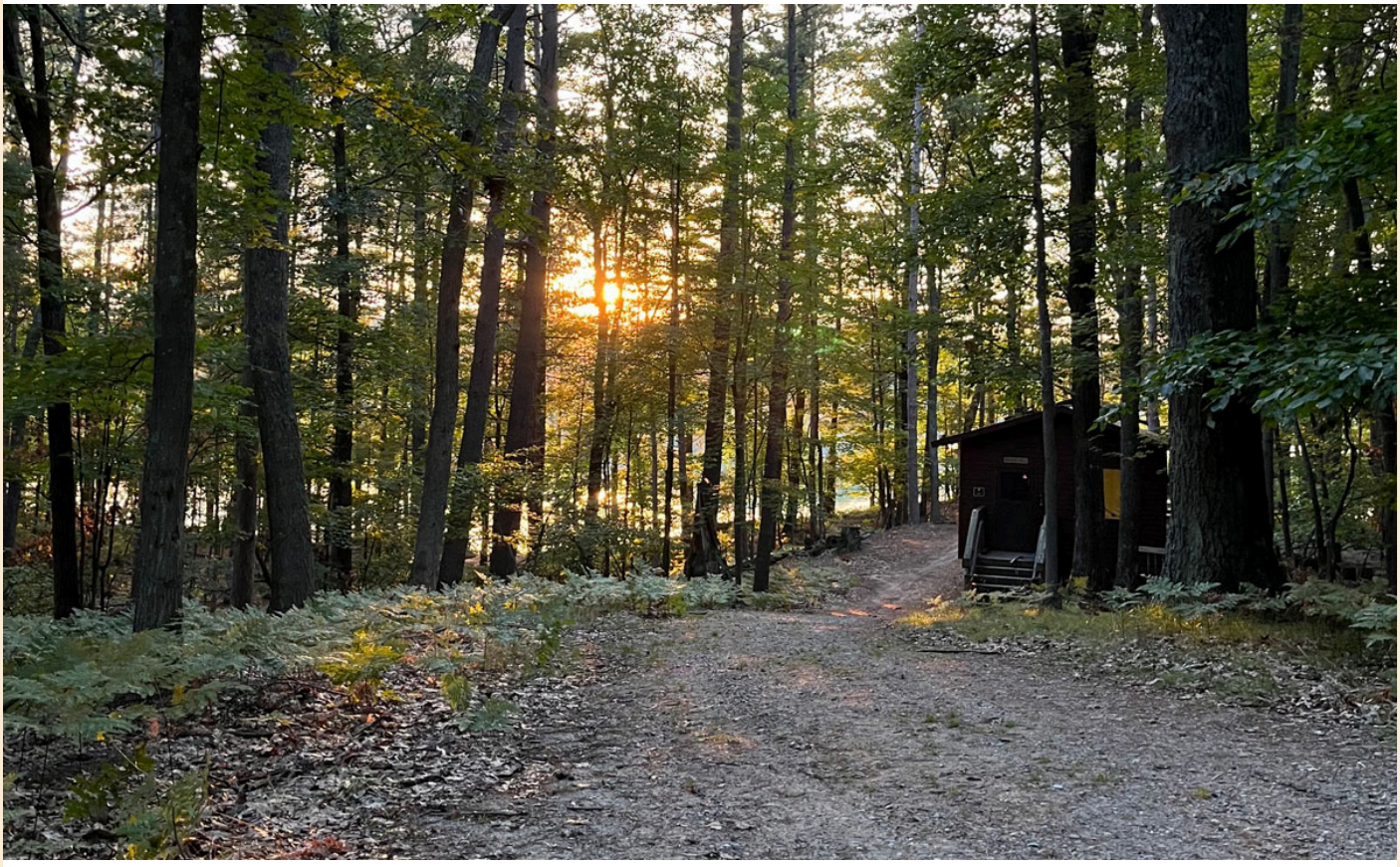
We're looking for a Nejee Ambassador to represent every year of Nejee history, going all the way back to 1950's!

Were you a Nejee camper or staff member? Do you still remember your cabin, your cabinmates, campfires, songs, traditions, and the feeling of finally making it to Nejee? If so, we'd love to have you help us with an exciting new cabin update and replacement initiative.

Our goal is to bring generations of Nejee alumni together to celebrate the history of this iconic division while helping ensure future campers have the same opportunity to call Nejee home. We plan to build two more cabins in the Nejee Division this Spring to replace the canvas tents we currently use.

As a Nejee Ambassador, you can help us:
Represent your Nejee year and reconnect with fellow campers and staff
Share memories, stories, and photos from your time in Nejee
Help us locate other alumni from your era
Spread the word about the cabin project
Encourage your Nejee friends to get involved and support the effort
Help preserve the traditions and spirit that have made Nejee special for generations
Whether your Nejee summer was in 1955, 1985, 2005, or 2025, and every year in between, we want to hear from you!

Once a Nejee camper, always a Nejee camper. Help us bring the generations together and build the next chapter of Nejee.



Calling All Alumni Artists!

Do you have a creative talent, artistic skill, or favorite hobby that you would be willing to share in support of camp?

As part of our end-of-year fundraising campaign, we are planning a special art auction and are looking for unique, camp-inspired items to feature.

We would love to showcase the creativity and talents of our alumni community through items such as paintings, photography, camp memorabilia, or other one-of-a-kind creations inspired by your camp experience.

If you are interested in donating a piece for the auction, please let us know. Your contribution will help support YMCA Hayo-Went-Ha Camps and ensure that future generations of campers can continue to experience the magic of camp.

Thank you for considering sharing your talents for the benefit of camp. We can't wait to see the incredible creations from our alumni community!

Please send your artwork to:

Amanda Macaluso
919 N. East Torch Lake Drive
Central Lake, MI 49622.



Founders Half Marathon

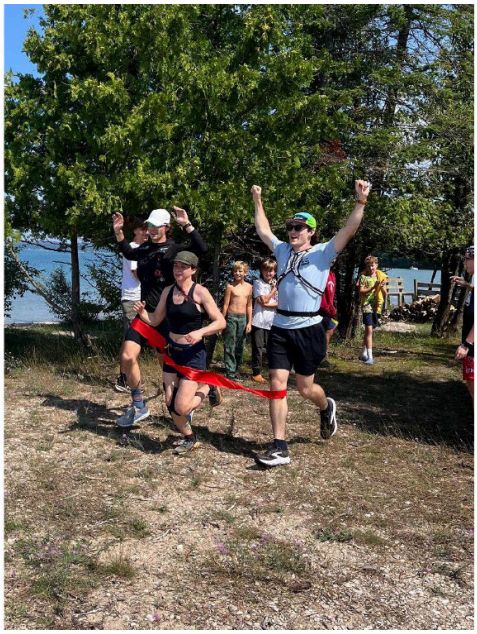
Congratulations to our Runners Three, who successfully completed the first, and perhaps now annual, Founders Three Half Marathon!

A huge shout-out to Theo Tolan, Henry Parkman, and Helen Schmitter for taking on the 13.1 mile challenge in support of our Campership Program. Their goal was to raise $100 per mile for each runner, and they exceeded it, raising more than $4,000 to help more children experience Hayo-Went-Ha Camps.

Thank you to everyone who donated, cheered them on, and supported this new initiative. Most of all, thank you to Theo, Henry, and Helen for stepping up, literally going the extra mile, and turning a great idea into meaningful support for future campers.

We may just have a new Hayo-Went-Ha Camps tradition on our hands!





Are You a Camp Alumni?

Are you interested in buying some alumni camp store merch? Check out the Alumni Camp Store.



Order Your Alumni Gear Today!

Give Your Camp Gear a Second Adventure

Anna Wojcik has been coming to Camp Arbutus Hayo-Went-Ha since she was nine years old. Now, as she prepares for her junior year of high school, she is turning her love of camp into service through a National Honor Society project.

Anna is organizing a gear drive to help ensure every camper has the equipment they need for their camp and wilderness adventures.

As you unpack from camp this summer, please save any clean, gently used gear your camper has outgrown. We especially need hiking boots, water shoes, rain gear, sleeping mats, dry-fit T-shirts, and fleece.



Donations can be dropped off at registration next summer or mailed to:

Gina Georgiou
YMCA Camp Arbutus Hayo-Went-Ha
1380 East Arbutus Lake Road
Traverse City, MI 49696

Thank you, Anna, for finding a great way to give back to camp and help the next camper get ready for their adventure!

Fresh Food and Hayo Chats at Providence Farms

This summer, our Food Service Director added more local and fresh produce to the salad bar, giving campers and staff even more healthy options throughout the season. Providence Farms was a great partner in helping us bring fresh, locally grown food to camp.

Providence Farms also became a wonderful gathering place for our Monday morning Day Camp Hayo Chats. Each Monday, we invited Day Camp families to stay for a cup of coffee after drop-off,

meet other families, and spend a little time connecting with the Hayo-Went-Ha community.

We loved these informal Monday mornings and plan to continue them next summer. Day Camp families, mark your calendars and join us every Monday at 9:00 a.m. at Providence Farms for coffee and a Hayo Chat!

Hayo-Chats will be offered again next year. See you there!



Super Saturdays

Super Saturday: Anything but ordinary.....

Super Saturdays are definitely not just another day of the week at Hayo-Went-Ha Camps! They are a chance for the entire camp to come together for a full day of fun, creativity, friendly competition, and a little bit of camp craziness.

Each Super Saturday takes on a different theme, transforming camp for the day and challenging campers and staff with themed activities, games, costumes, and special events. From the moment the day begins, campers never quite know what adventure might be waiting for them.

This summer brought some fantastic themes and plenty of memorable moments. Our Program Directors and staff put their creativity to work, creating experiences that brought campers of all ages together and made each Super Saturday one of the highlights of the summer.

It is another one of those Hayo-Went-Ha Camps traditions that proves there really is no such thing as an ordinary day at camp! This year's themes include secret agent, game night, fairy whimsy, American History, World Cup, lord of the Rings, Revolutionary War, and Zombie Apocalypse.



What Camp Can Teach the World

A recent article from Harvard's Graduate School of Education caught our attention, and we wanted to share it with our Hayo-Went-Ha Camps

community.

Titled "How to Organize for Human Development: What Schools Can Learn from Summer Camps," the article explores how camps help young people develop confidence, resilience, leadership, independence, and strong relationships through meaningful experiences and supportive communities.

It's exciting to see the broader educational community recognizing what so many of us have known all along: camp is much more than a summer experience. It is a place where young people develop the skills and character that will serve them for a lifetime.

Read Article

Back on the Bikes: Alumni Return to Camp

Some camp traditions are just too good to leave behind!

This summer, Hayo-Went-Ha Camps alumni Sarah Baybeck and MegVo decided it was time to relive a favorite part of their camper and staff days. Both spent time as Biker campers and counselors, so they got back on their bikes for an alumni Biker trip from Lake Leelanau to camp and back, completing an impressive 100 miles in two days.

Their ride brought back memories of long days on the road, plenty of miles, and the friendships and adventures that made their time as Biker campers and counselors so memorable.



The best part came when Sarah and MegVo rode back into camp, where they were greeted with cheers and excitement from the camp community. It was a perfect Hayo-Went-Ha welcome and a reminder that no matter how many years have passed, coming back to camp can make you feel like a camper all over again.

Congratulations, Sarah and MegVo, on completing 100 miles and showing us that there is always time for another Hayo-Went-Ha Camps dventure!

Welcoming Our Neighbors to Camp

This summer, both YMCA Camp Arbutus Hayo-Went-Ha and YMCA Camp Torch Hayo-Went-Ha opened their doors to local friends and neighbors for a Local Lunch date.

Community members were invited to join our campers and staff for lunch, experience camp in action, and see firsthand what a typical summer meal looks like. It was a meaningful way to connect with our neighbors, share stories, answer questions, and introduce new friends to Hayo-Went-Ha Camps.



We loved having so many members of our local community around the table with us and look forward to continuing our Local Lunches next summer.

Thank you to everyone who joined us. There is always a seat at the Hayo-Went-Ha Camps table! See you next year!

Celebrating Our Heritage and Building the Future

The Heritage Club recognizes individuals and families who have chosen to include YMCA Hayo-Went-Ha Camps in their long-term giving plans. Through bequests, insurance policies, stocks, property, gifts to our endowment, and other planned gifts, Heritage Club members are helping build a strong financial foundation for the future of our camps.

This year, we are excited to bring our Heritage Club members together on October 3 for our 1st annual Heritage Club Celebration at YMCA Camp Torch Hayo-Went-Ha. It will be an opportunity to reconnect, share stories, celebrate the history of our camps, and thank those who have made a lasting commitment to our future.

We are also beginning work on a special Reflection Garden at the Torch Lake property. With a beautiful view overlooking Torch Lake, this peaceful space will provide a place to reflect, remember, and celebrate the people whose love for Hayo-Went-Ha Camps has helped shape our camps. We look forward to sharing more about this project as plans develop.

And this is only the beginning. Each year, we plan to bring our Heritage Club community together to celebrate. In 2027, we will take the celebration to YMCA Camp Arbutus Hayo-Went-Ha, and finding that special area at that site for reflection.



If Hayo-Went-Ha Camps has played an important role in your life or your family's story, we invite you to consider becoming part of the Heritage Club. A planned gift of any size is an opportunity to preserve what you love about camp while helping ensure that future generations have the same chance to discover what makes Hayo-Went-Ha Camps so special.

Our history was built by generations who believed in camp. Our future will be too.

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 **YMCA HAYO-WENT-HA CAMPS**
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Our Contact Information
YMCA Hayo-Went-Ha Camps • 919 Northeast Torch Lake Drive
Central Lake, MI 49622
231.544.5915 • **https://hayowentha.org**

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