



Report to the Board of Directors

Camp Winnataska

Summer 2016



Overview

Winnataska had a wonderfully successful camping season in 2016. The year was marked as my first in the Summer Camp Director position as well as Tricia Brice's first year in the Summer Program Director position. Although there were challenges in having so many new staff members, the summer was a success by many measures. The heart of Winnataska is allowing children to unwind from modern society and enjoy the outdoors in a safe and caring Christian environment. Camp is more than learning how to ride a horse, it is learning to enjoy the person God made you through play and interacting with others.

My "freshman" year as Summer Camp Director was a challenging one. Both Tricia and I, new in our positions, spent the summer learning how to run the camp. I am glad that the first year is under my belt, and am looking forward to building upon this foundation in the future.

I hope to share with you some things that I think need to be brought to your attention. I will try to not overwhelm you with too many details. If more information is needed about a particular subject, I will be happy to supply it.

Respectfully submitted,

Ann Pickens

Summer Camp Director

Staff

Winnataska's ability to attract outstanding young men and women is one of its greatest assets, and this summer was no exception. The Comanches (18) and Blackfeet (7) numbered 25, a slight reduction from last year's staff. One Blackfoot was released part way through the summer due to discipline issues.

Achievements, successes, goals accomplished:

- ✦ During exit interviews, almost every staff member commented that their favorite part of being on staff was getting to know the other staff members. This staff was remarkably cohesive. I believe this was in large part due to the leadership among the returning Comanches.
- ✦ There was one returning Blackfoot at the beginning of the summer; however, when he left camp partially through the summer the remaining six guys stepped up.
- ✦ Five Comanches were returning staff members. These returning staff members were invaluable this summer. They willingly took on extra responsibilities to make sure the camp ran smoothly.
- ✦ The staff members appreciated that Tricia and I gave them the freedom to make decisions about their program areas and night activities, yet provided support when needed. In doing so, I believe they learned valuable lessons about leading groups, organizing, time management, adjusting plans when necessary, and taking ownership. In other words, staff members received a great deal of "hands-on" experience.
- ✦ Tricia and I set out at the beginning of the summer to create an environment that allowed the staff to feel valued. In their exit interviews many staff members noted this and commented that being a part of this team was a special experience.
- ✦ Many campers and directors mentioned the staff as the best part of Winnataska.



Issues, concerns, problems to be addressed:

- ✱ The balance between maintenance and camper focused activities is always hard to strike. This summer we tried to cut back on several “Special Operations” positions for the staff members and instead spread those jobs out throughout all of the staff members. Although this solves the problems that arise from having different levels of staff members, it also creates the possibility that work does not get done in an efficient manner.
- ✱ Keeping staff numbers low is hard when trying to account for the shared maintenance and cleaning duties.
- ✱ The summer ended with a staff injury, which the board has been updated on. The staff member was severely burned; however, immediate response by camp and medical staff resulted in a full and speedy recovery. The incident was preventable, next year we need to readdress our safety training procedures throughout camp.

Recommendations:

1. **Hire at least ten Blackfeet**, I realize this is based largely on available applicants each year, but it is a major operating priority.
2. **Clearly define maintenance and cleaning expectations for Staff at the beginning of the summer.**
3. **Explicitly set out safety expectations** in all areas of camp. We have thorough training in many of our high risk program areas, but common tasks around camp have traditionally been taught in a more laid back manner, expecting staff members to simply pass the information from generation to generation. We need to revamp the training procedures on all staff, leader, and volunteer jobs around camp that extend beyond these specialized or ACA required trainings that we currently provide.
4. **Set up lifeguard, horse, and rope training for staff members during the spring.** Our current schedule with a brief pre-Camp doesn't allow for adequate time for trainings. This means lifeguard training would probably need to move off campus.
5. **Provide more training time with Staff** on how to effectively manage children, teach content within their program area, and lead groups. This could include more days in pre-camp, if the ropes, lifeguard, and horse trainings are moved to a separate training weekend.

Leaders

During the summer, over 175 leaders volunteered their time to be a leader at camp. The lasting impact that they have on campers cannot be measured. In truth, this position is the most important at camp and often receives the least attention.

Achievements, successes, goals accomplished:

- ✦ This was the first year for Leaders to use the online Camp Brain system to apply, this allowed easier communication throughout the rest of the camp season.
- ✦ We created a mentor system with the leaders and staff. Each leader had one assigned staff member who would touch base with them on the first day of camp and continue to check on them periodically throughout the week.
- ✦ We had a good number of LIT's, especially boys, with whom we have a good relationship and will be able to follow up with them if we do not receive their application.
- ✦ We creatively used leaders as "hut dads" and "hut moms" to give support to huts that did not have enough leaders.



Issues, concerns, problems to be addressed:

- ✦ Returning leaders receive the same training as new leaders. I feel that we should be asking more of our returning leaders, but it is hard to do so when they are never separated out.
- ✦ High school students do not check their email regularly. Text messaging is the primary form of communication; it is hard to communicate all details via text.
- ✦ As seems to be the pattern for the last few years, we were short boy leaders. Sports seem to conflict and lessen participation in the high school years.
- ✦ High school students are not sure of their summer plans, even as late as March.

Recommendations:

1. **Communicate with the parents of leaders in the spring.** Even though we encourage leaders to fully communicate with camp, keeping parents updated would probably save some miscommunication.
2. **Offer a CPR course at camp multiple times during the spring.** We always have leaders who are scrambling to find CPR courses at the last minute.

3. **Emphasize recruiting boy leaders** through high schools and churches, using camp alumni and friends as a resource. Many of our best male leaders come as recommendations from camp alumni.
4. **Separate returning and new leader training.** This would allow new leaders to feel free to ask more questions as well as provide the opportunity to set higher expectations for returning leaders. This past year we had to ask several returning leaders to attend the alternate training date due to our inability to house all the leaders at one time, splitting the group more evenly between two weekends would allow a better experience for all.

Parents and Campers

Winnataska hosted over 1,500 campers this summer, including two Chico only weeks. Most of our campers hailed from Birmingham, although a large number came from Huntsville and the greater Atlanta area as well. Parent interaction begins prior to registration; however, much of the parents' camp experience revolves around our online presence and registration experience.

Achievements, successes, goals accomplished:

- ✦ Web-based Camp Brain allowed Mary Owen and I to have real-time updates to the registration status of campers throughout the year. It also allows for parents to more easily check their account.
- ✦ We had over 1000 campers register on opening day of registration, a record for Winnataska.
- ✦ The total number of campers, 1540, was also a record for Winnataska.
- ✦ Parents received an immediate confirmation email from Camp Brain followed by a general information email from us with details concerning packing lists and what to expect at Winnataska.
- ✦ Leading up to their week at camp parents received two session specific emails including hut assignments, directions for arrival, and links to all material online.
- ✦ Daily pictures and Camper email based in Camp Brain allowed a streamlining of our online systems. The daily pictures continue to be one of the most valuable ways to communicate with parents.
- ✦ Health Forms were integrated into the Camp Brain registration process. This allowed the Health Hut staff to digitally search for information and create reports.
- ✦ Chico only weeks continued to be a huge hit with first time camp families. This serves as a fantastic recruitment tool for Winnataska and helps lesson the Chico waiting lists.



Issues, concerns, problems to be addressed:

- ✦ More and more parents are asking to pick their child up for a short period of time during the camp session. Our policy has always been to discourage this practice, yet handle it on an individual basis. This summer we had four separate families who would call each day to notify us if the child would be leaving camp for a ball game. This is in addition to parents who followed our normal procedure and let us know at the beginning of the session.
- ✦ Many parents left blanks on the Health Form in order to complete the registration process quickly. This resulted in the Health Hut staff having to track down small pieces of information or correct inconsistencies.
- ✦ On registration day, the overwhelming number of people trying to access the site resulted in many families having to wait for an extended period of time before accessing the system. Although Mary Owen and I were able to help many of these parents, it did create anxiety for many during the process.
- ✦ The camp website is beginning to look dated. This is by no means an emergency but we do want to stay relatively up to date with our competitors.
- ✦ Camper discipline problems are focused most often in down town and when there are large age gaps in boy huts.

Recommendations:

1. **Clearly state in the registration process that out of camp excursions must be solidified prior to camp starting.** I think it would be impossible for us to completely eliminate these excursions but we need a more streamlined process for them.
2. **Allow parents to complete the Health Form at a later date** than the registration. The Health Hut coordinator, Susan Thorington, believes we will get more accurate information if we create a separate due date for the Health Forms. They can still be online we simply do not need to require them for registration. Instead, we can set a Health Form date in the spring, possibly connected to the April 1st deadline for payments. Mary Owen and I believe this will also alleviate some of the anxiety associated with the registration process.
3. **The website should be redesigned in the Fall of 2017** to coincide with rolling out the newly designed logo on all Camp Winnataska items leading up to the 100th Anniversary. We should change all of our marketing image at one time, if we are planning on making a logo shift after this next summer that would be the prime time to refresh the website as well.
4. **Establish an extra camper location** that would allow Mary Owen and I to split the oldest boys' cabin in two separate groups for sessions that have very few oldest campers. This would avoid the repeated problem we have faced with having 8th and 9th grade boys spending time alongside 6th and 7th grade boys.

Program Areas

The staff worked hard to keep the campers happy while learning new things. Each day, the huts rotated through 7 periods. Each Program Specialist felt that they were able to build upon the successes of past years and in addition, add some new and exciting activities to keep campers engaged.

Achievements, successes, goals accomplished:

- ✦ Horses ran very smoothly and had one of the most successful summers in recent history. Campers were able to go on longer rides than previous summers.
- ✦ Pool was able to provide some scheduling solutions to allow campers slightly more choice than they had received last summer in their daily rotations. Working with waterfront to share lifeguards also allowed staff to experience more than one corner of camp.
- ✦ Outdoors worked very hard to make the camp-out memorable, building on the success from last summer.
- ✦ Recreation was reinvigorated this year with the addition of the Canteen and bathrooms to the Gylvilion. This allowed the Rec Staff to save valuable time in the transition from activity to Canteen. The addition also allowed for easier storage of many materials and more functional rainy day locations.
- ✦ Crafts tried to create more activities geared toward various hut interest, this is something they want to build on in the future.
- ✦ Ropes had successful summer. The staff reintroduced many low elements that had not been used in the previous summers.
- ✦ Waterfront found success in rotating their activities throughout the week, allowing all campers to participate but not creating unsupervised activities.
- ✦ Shooting Sports built on its first year's success with the addition of more tomahawks and varied activities with the darts and sling shots.



Issues, concerns, problems to be addressed:

- ✱ Crafts needs to be revamped. The activities this year were often of such low quality that the campers didn't care to take them home or could not find their craft at the end of the week. Boys huts continued to be disengaged when they were present.
- ✱ Outdoors is a program area that succeeds or fails often times based on the Program Specialist. I believe we need to hire someone next summer who is willing to work with Tricia and I to create more unique outdoors/camping experiences tailored to each age group.

Recommendations:

1. **Get Program Specialists confirmations earlier in the season.** This way, they can play a key role in planning, especially in areas like outdoors and crafts which require more thoughtful lesson plans. We also need to pay these individuals for the time they spend planning for camp if we want to attract people who will give us quality work in that preparation.
2. **Crafts needs to be a higher priority in planning.** This was something that is squarely Tricia and I not understanding the level of planning it would take to achieve the Crafts program we desire. Next year we plan to budget more money per camper and to be much more directly involved in planning the activities.
3. **Establish a safe route to the top portion of Winnataska's property.** Much of our planning is hemmed in due to the fact that some great areas to camp are unsafe to reach due to Camp Winnataska Rd splitting the property. In the long term plan I want to keep reiterating the need for a safe route.
4. **Continue to encourage program areas to break into smaller groups.** Many activities are more successful and offer more camper participation if huts are broken into two smaller groups (i.e. the days when Outdoors split between fishing and kayaking). In order for this to happen, we must have enough staff in program areas even when a staff member is on maintenance or cleaning duty.
5. **Offer more camper choices.** I do think exposure to all the activities is very worthwhile, but I also think that campers need to be able to choose some of their activities. I know we have tried this in the past with little success, but we need to continue to research how other camps accomplish this.

Night Activities

For many campers, the night activities are the most exciting part of camp. In 2016, a new night activity was added – Holiday Night – it included combined elements from several past night activities. A discussion also arose during the summer as to the question of having Holy Grail as an activity every night.

Achievements, successes, goals accomplished:

- ✦ Campers consistently rated Mission Impossible night as their favorite activity. Since this requires very little planning ahead of time it is a great success!
- ✦ The few weeks that were able to run Holiday Night seemed to enjoy it and I believe we could build on it in future years
- ✦ 5th week tested the idea of allowing campers to turn on lights and make noise after Friday Grail as a way to have Grail on Friday yet give the campers some “fun” last night memories. Campers, leaders, and directors enjoyed the evening.



Issues, concerns, problems to be addressed:

- ✦ Olympic night consistently rates lowest among campers. Although I feel that any Sunday night activity is going to rank low as campers are still warming up to their week at camp, there is always room for improvement. The staff modified and adjusted the schedule according to feedback from campers and directors.

Recommendations:

1. **The Board of Directors has already taken action on the Holy Grail question and decided that we will have the pageant every Mainside camp.** Mary Owen and I need to continue to communicate that information to any parents who might have questions, but I think the issue is resolved.
2. **Holy Grail needs to be limited to Friday nights.** Because occasionally the fuel and hay left in the gorge make for unpleasant Waterfront experience on Friday after Thursdays Grails, I do not want to risk the functioning of our most popular program on the last day of camp with having Thursday Grail. I think weeks that want to allow campers a “fun” memory on the last night

should be allowed to forego the quiet atmosphere after the pageant for activities of the staff and directors' choosing.

- 3. Sunday and Wednesday nights need to be revamped.** These two nights have traditionally struggled, Tricia and I intend to spend time this winter researching possibilities from other camps for night activities that might fit our needs.

Looking Ahead

It is my intention to return to Camp Winnataska next year as Summer Camp Director, and the Board has also voted to approve Tricia Brice to return as the Summer Program Director. I felt supported, appreciated, and encouraged. I enjoyed getting to know many of you better than I did before. I love how our camp experiences are all so different, yet we all have a deep love for Winnataska. Thank you for all the work you do to make me, Tricia, and the staff look good!

Tricia and I fully believe that our summer would not have been possible without a good staff. We believe that our summer was incredible due the amazing staff we had. All of the planning means little if the people executing do not see the same vision. We cannot commend these young people enough for their hard work and enthusiasm from January through August.

I know in my first year I haven't skimmed the surface of all I would like to be able to do for camp. I look forward to continuing to work on program and logistical improvements as well mentoring the staff and leaders who will be the next generation of our camp family.