

Winnebago Scout Reservation 2016-2020 Continuous Camp Improvement Program Commentary

Winnebago Scout Reservation is a 450-acre Council owned property in Rockaway, N.J. located adjacent to the Split Rock Reservoir.

Winnebago, one of three resident Boy Scout summer camps the Council operates, is managed by Curt Haak. Curt began his career at Winnebago as the Assistant Ranger. In 2011 he became Reservation Director and Camp Director. He resides on the property.

Under Curt's management, Winnebago has thrived. The summer camp operates near capacity and the camp is fully utilized for weekend camping the remainder of the year. Curt and his team have revitalized what five years ago was an underutilized camp: attendance is up dramatically, a new shower house opened in 2012, food service has been significantly upgraded to the point where people look forward to certain theme meals on specified nights (i.e. Southwestern on Wednesday night, Italian on Friday night) with great anticipation. A dual 1,000-foot zip line across the lake opened in 2014. Curt also puts heavy emphasis on customer satisfaction. For example, he has streamlined the Sunday check-in process, even offering an "easy check-in" on Tuesday evening before arrival in camp. In 2015 he introduced a new paddleboard program, an expanded kayak program and secured 65 new life vests.

Curt has been key to the recent success of the camp and is a valuable and highly regarded member of the Council staff.

Below is a brief explanation of the areas for improvement in the Continuous Camp Improvement Program, several of which will require financing. While the Council currently has no capital monies available, Curt has cultivated several major donors in recent years. These donors have contributed significant funding for the zip line mentioned above, a new Handicraft Pavilion currently in the planning process, repair of a backhoe as well as lesser purchases like the new life jackets and 10 paddle boards. While there are no guarantees, Curt is reasonably confident his donors will assist with funding the projects discussed below.

Another potential source of funding is the Flintlocks, a group of retired Scouters who spend at least one day a week at camp providing a wide range of construction and maintenance services from electrical work to roof repair. The Flintlocks recently contributed \$55,000 for a complete renovation of the Corwin Training Center, the largest cabin—and revenue producing facility--on the property.

Dining Hall Expansion

The weekly capacity of Winnebago is not a function of the number of available beds, which are actually plentiful, but the number of seats in the Dining Hall. The Dining Hall currently seats 340 people. During the typical week this breaks down to 280 scouts and leaders and 60 staff. For most weeks over the last several years, the facility has been at or near capacity.

There is space for an additional six tables on the front porch. However, the front wall of the Dining Hall completely isolates anyone sitting on the porch from the activity in the Dining Hall. Seating scouts on the porch removes them completely from the activity inside.

By removing the existing front wall and enclosing the porch, those six tables become part of the life of the Dining Hall and allow 48 more youth to benefit from the program weekly. Equally important, 48 additional scouts represents slightly more than a 15% increase in weekly revenues.

This improvement is the single most significant revenue raising opportunity currently available at Winnebago.

Campsites

Excluding the site used by the provisional troop, Winnebago has twelve campsites that can sleep up to 426 individuals. There has been a pronounced trend in recent years of troops bringing fewer scouts to camp. In some cases, a troop reserves a site and then registers fewer than the minimum number of scouts designated for that site. This potentially makes that site unavailable to a much larger troop with greater revenue generating capacity and, in a worst-case scenario, may prevent that troop from coming to Winnebago. To avoid this situation, Curt will arrange for two units to share on campsite—a delicate negotiation at best, but necessary for the financial well being of the camp. Curt's strong working relationship with the troops has prevented any serious issues in this area to date.

Campsite Division

Dividing selected campsites into "A" and "B" sites to accommodate two smaller units would more permanently address the issue discussed above. The division would initially require reconfiguration of tent platforms and building a new fire pit, bulletin board, flagpole and fire safety station in each site. Would also eventually require construction of a second pavilion on the site. Construction of additional latrines is not anticipated.

Lean-to Sites

Winnebago has three lean-to sites. They are historically the least popular sites in camp. During the 2015 season, they were the only sites not occupied all four weeks of camp. Troops will often opt for more remote, less desirable tent sites rather than occupy the lean-tos. Curt believes this is largely a privacy issue: the open front of each lean-to affords the scouts no privacy. He proposes

building a solid wall half way up the front of each structure. The top half would be screened in. Access would be through a screen door. In addition to providing a privacy barrier, it would also considerably diminish the mosquito problem. The cost would be insignificant. All materials are on hand.

Outdoor Skills Program Area

The objective is to replace the existing tarp/dirt floor with a permanent pavilion/concrete floor. This is the program area most in need of a major upgrade after the Handicraft area.

Troop Retention

The percent of troops returning to Winnebago each summer has been set at a relatively low 55% in recognition of the fact that a significant number of troops are on a 3-4 year rotation cycle between different camps.

Troop Relationships/Marketing

Developing new summer camp business at Winnebago is nuanced. Because the camp is at capacity, recruiting a new unit and then not having space for them could be a public relations nightmare. The equation gets more complex when you factor in smaller units and troops that rotate (will they be back in 3 years? 4 years? 5 years?). With this in mind, it is important to always be in front of prospective troops, but not oversell. Curt's strategy is to develop a working relationship not only with summer camp troops, but with every troop that camps at Winnebago weekends during the year. A primary objective is understanding their summer camp pattern in order to identify opportunities.

Net Income

The camp ended 2014 with a small operating surplus for the year-round program. There is a good chance 2015 will end the same way. The objective is to be at least slightly in the black each year based not just on summer camp, but on year-round operations.

District Activities

The camp is currently rented to districts for a set fee. The Camping Committee should review the adequacy of this payment structure in comparison to the revenue potential from renting camp facilities on a normal weekend.

Council Activities

The same objective as district activities. By policy, some council committees do not pay for use of the camp. An example would be the Training Committee when it hosts Scoutmaster Fundamentals. This represents four weekends of revenue in the south end of camp each year, including the Corwin Training Center, the most lucrative facility in camp. We recognize unit volunteers cannot be expected to make up the entire shortfall, but feel strongly that there should be some level of compensation.