

KEEPING THE FIRES BURNING

A History and Memoir of Camp Nebagamon

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The Camp Nebagamon Alumni Association (CNAA)

Shortly after our retirement in 1990, we established an alumni association to benefit camp's vast alumni group, as well as Camp Nebagamon itself. Sally and I began the initial step of establishing a database. Camp had always maintained an eight-hundred-person mailing list for *The Arrowhead*, camp's monthly newspaper, but this list primarily contained recent alumni and only others who had specifically requested inclusion. The whereabouts of the vast majority of alumni were unknown. We contacted a few private camps directors who had already developed alumni organizations but found few good prototypes. Our work had just begun.

Next, we asked a cross section of St. Louis alumni, representing various decades, to come to our home for a brainstorming session. This group included Alan "Hoss" Mayer, Ted Isaacs, Warner Isaacs, Jim Rosen, Jeff Eastman, Randy Shapiro, Spencer Garland, Lon Zimmerman, Ron Scharff, and Jeff and Steve Loeb. Our discussion centered on objectives for the organization, dues, publications, and activities the group might undertake. In this productive meeting, many ideas were presented and endorsed or rejected. After many attempts to define the purpose of the CNAA, Jim Rosen said that CNAA's purpose was "to foster and enhance the bonds of friendship we all shared at Nebagamon." Those thirteen words summed it up and are to be found in the front of each annual directory of the CNAA. The evening was about to conclude when Jeff Eastman suggested that each person at the meeting contribute seed money to launch the association, and that money got CNAA off to a rolling start. Spencer Garland also donated his legal skills to establish CNAA as an official 501(c)(7) organization. CNAA's initial board consisted of Sally, Bud Herzog, and myself.

Sally and I enthusiastically began expanding the alumni database. I did most of the phoning and investigative work, and Sally spent many months establishing the computer database, entering the fields, and did all the typing. We contacted key alumni in major "camp cities," who were enthusiastic about helping us collect names, addresses, and other pertinent data. Membership dues covered the publishing and mailing of three multi-paged newsletters and a directory annually. We initially sent a mass mailing to all alumni with known addresses in order to explain CNAA and invite them to join. Membership blanks and dues started flying back with updated information on alumni and news of their families. We were spending countless hours in this endeavor but were happy with the enthusiasm and interest the project engendered.

The CNAA alumni directory contained an alphabetical list of names, addresses, phone numbers, occupation, city of origin, years at camp, and e-mail addresses. Names were also sorted by cities at the back of the directory. We named the newsletter *The Keylog*, and Dana Gustafson volunteered to do the graphic design at the top of the pages. Each *Keylog* contained articles of interest, updates on camp, alumni news reported by decade, and many historical pictures. Publishing it was more of a challenge than we expected. Between these efforts and those on the directory, we were overwhelmed with work and cut back to two *Keylogs* a year and reduced the dues.

We had originally told Roger and Judy Wallenstein (and our-selves) we would run the organization for five years. One day we woke up to the fact that ten years had passed, that we were still spending many hours per week on CNAA, and that our life was still circumscribed by the needs of Camp Nebagamon. At that point we asked Roger and Judy to step in and take over the *Keylog* and directory. This was a smooth transition, and Roger and Judy and their staff brought the organization forward. When Adam Kaplan and Stephanie Hanson took over camp in 2003, we were delighted that they asked our daughter Jane Stein Kerr to take over the *Keylogs* and the directory. Jane has graciously spent countless volunteer hours at this task. The Camp Nebagamon office has taken over data entry and has played an increasingly effective role in boosting membership and gathering news. We continue to gather information, enhance membership, and copy read publications. CNAA, as of this writing, continues to be an active part of our volunteer lives.

With an updated database of alumni names and addresses, Camp Nebagamon has been able to send invitations to alumni to attend regular winter reunions, thus linking our alumni to the current camp family. In addition this database has been of great value in reminding alumni that camp is alive and well and still providing excellent experiences for boys. It also greatly helped the fund-raising abilities of both the Camp Nebagamon Scholarship Fund and Camperships for Nebagamon. After we established CNAA and other camps learned of its success, I consulted with several other camps and organizations, helping them establish similar alumni associations.

As part of our outreach to alumni, Sally and I raised the funds from several generous alumni to support the digitizing of all eighteen thousand-plus camp pictures from the wire-bound albums. Because the pictures were in bound albums and had to be scanned individually, this was a time-consuming process. Troy Brodsky, former camper, counselor, and program director, did the scanning, and spent an entire year in Lake Nebagamon, winter and all, accomplishing this tedious chore. Several years prior, Troy had also produced a wonderful video about Muggs Lorber, commemorating the hundredth anniversary of his birth. (Anyone wanting this video can procure it from the camp office.) Sally and I also arranged to have eight thousand-plus camp lists and documents (for instance, *The Arrowheads*) scanned by a firm in Duluth. These documents and pictures will eventually be available to alumni through the Internet.

In conclusion, we feel the Camp Nebagamon Alumni Association has served the purpose Jim Rosen articulated, "To foster and enhance the bonds of friendship we all shared at Camp Nebagamon." Many alumni have been able to reconnect to camp, its staff, its campers, and its scholarship funds. Sally and I are happy that we launched this project and that it can now "fly" on its own.