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YMCA Camp Chingachgook on Lake George Celebrates its Centennial

BY GEORGE PAINTER

*E*stablished in 1913, YMCA Camp Chingachgook is one of the oldest children's camps in America and is presently celebrating 100 years of operation. Over 350,000 children have participated

in Camp Chingachgook programs in the last century.

Started by the Schenectady YMCA as a summer camp for boys, the first campers arrived by steamboat to the Pilot Knob,

NY wharf for a few weeks of outdoor education and recreation. The camp served about 90 boys the first summer, with college students serving as counselors and a military-style camp program that was



Group of campers, 1915. All photos courtesy of the YMCA Camp Chingachgook Archives.



A big milestone is making that first dive headfirst into the water. Over and over, for 100 years, Chingachgook's campers have successfully faced that personal challenge. These photos show the continuity of experience that campers have had for 100 years. *Top: Diving tower, 1923. Bottom: Diving, 2010.*



Canoeing, 1956.



Girls canoeing, 2010.

typical during that time period. The boys slept in army tents on cots, with mattresses stuffed with straw, and ate in the large mess tent at the top of the hill. Their day was filled with swimming, boating, archery, hiking, campfires, and chores to keep the camp clean and organized.

In 1922, the Boy Scouts also started using this campground in the summer with the support of the Schenectady Rotary Club. The Scouts stopped using the Camp Chingachgook site during World War II, when it was closed for a few seasons.

Chingachgook wilderness adventure trips were organized, beginning in 1966, to travel to Canada and across the northeast. Today, the adventure trip program serves about 250 teens each summer with kayaking, rock climbing, white-water rafting, sailing, and hiking programs throughout the country, teaching leadership and outdoor living skills. In 1976, Chingachgook became a co-ed program, and today it

serves 300 campers each summer session, half boys and half girls. The sessions last one or two weeks.

School outdoor education programs, first offered in 1983, were created in the spring and fall as a service to students and teachers with lessons in ecology, map and

compass usage, team building, hiking, and pioneer and colonial history. Today, the YMCA Camp serves over 4,000 students each year, partnering with over 60 local and regional school districts.

In the past 25 years, the Camp's programs, facilities, and infrastructure have

dramatically strengthened compared to the early summers of tents. Over \$7 million have been invested in water and septic systems and new buildings and structures, including a new dining hall, program lodge, hike center, climbing tower, docks, and 30 cabins. Today, Chingachgook serves over 10,000 children and adults annually in year-round programs on Lake George in the Adirondack Mountains. ▼



At the core of life at Camp Chingachgook is the tent or cabin group. Up to 9 campers of about the same age and a counselor, usually a college student, assistant counselor, and counselor aide live in close quarters for the session. This intense first experience of group living outside family forms bonds that can last a lifetime. *Top:* Tent group, 1948. *Bottom:* Tent group, 1981.

George Painter has spent the last 47 summers involved with YMCA Camp Chingachgook on Lake George as a camper, counselor, unit director, outdoor education director, and executive director.



He has led the small summer camp in the Adirondack Mountains to become a year-round outdoor education center with over \$7 million in new facility and program improvements and over 10,000 guests per year in summer camp, school outdoor education, and family retreats.

The Camp Chingachgook Alumni Association and the Capital District YMCA have spearheaded a year of centennial celebrations and a \$1 million centennial capital campaign to make needed improvements to position the Camp for its next century of service to youth. A centennial exhibit will be on display at the Crandall Public Library Folklife Center in Glens Falls, NY, from July 19 through December 2013.

For more information, contact YMCA Camp Chingachgook, 1872 Pilot Knob Road, Kattskill Bay, NY 12844, 518-656-9462, chingachgook@cdymca.org. Press inquiries can be directed to recently retired camp executive director George Painter at 518-361-3826.

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