

From Surviving To Thriving

**Camp-
management
solutions
for property
owners**

By Mike Carr

Owning a camp takes expertise and dedication. Often, at the same time children's feet run through the lodge, the water heater goes on the blink, or the oven in the kitchen refuses to heat up. But those who love camp continue to return year after year, so owners continue to fulfill their mission. It is a

love, a calling to serve, yet the challenges that accompany camp ownership can be plentiful.

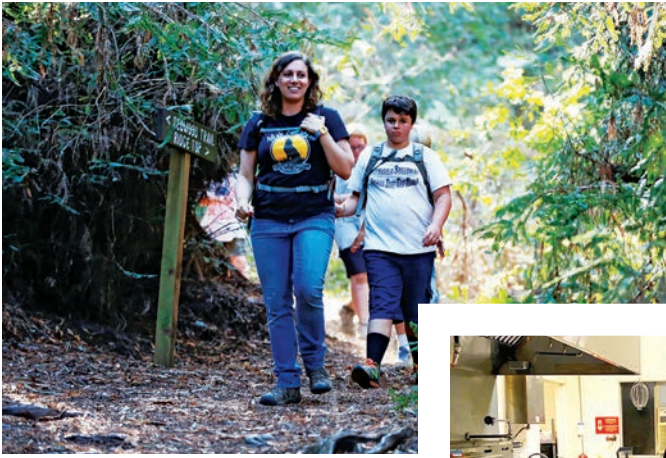
So how does one ensure that camp runs smoothly from an owner's perspective? This article is written for those who are looking to go from surviving to thriving.

Running a camp entails many

responsibilities, including but not limited to property maintenance, finances, staffing, payroll, running programs, and regulation compliance. But how does one solve the following common challenges?

- Staffing
- Managing a budget
- Managing projects





Challenge 1 Staffing

As most camp owners know, staff members can make or break an organization. It is vital to have the right people who reflect a camp's values and promote its mission. Having excellent staff members to handle the day-to-day operations and flow helps owners and directors relax, knowing everything is being handled and campers are well cared for. Yet the challenges of hiring in today's market are even more significant than those of last year, as there are at least twice as many posted job openings as there are registered job seekers.



Posting job applications online and removing the requirement for cover letters for entry-level positions may help to expedite the process in finding good employees to fill positions.

interview—even after what seemed to have been a good phone screen. If a candidate does honor the scheduled interview time and appears to be a good potential hire, ask the following:

- What makes working for the camp unique?

SOLUTION 1 **Utilize word-of-mouth.** To find the right staff members, the first rule is to reach out to people you know, and this means current staff members. Make sure they are aware of the hiring needs. Put up a flyer in the staff break area that lists current or upcoming job openings. Also, consider a staff-referral bonus of some type, like gas cards, as they will certainly be welcomed!

SOLUTION 2 **Compare/contrast competitors' recruitment advertising.** Were ads posted last year? If so, it might be a clever idea to “check out the competition” and see how other organizations are getting job seekers to apply. Are competitors' pay rates in the same range as those of other camps hiring similar workers? Consider offering a “stay bonus” to seasonal hires to incentivize more of them to stay through the end of a busy summer. Make it easy to apply by linking an online employment application to the job ad. (Your employment application is online, right?) Is the application optimized for mobile devices? Are you still asking for cover letters for entry-level summer positions? If so, consider removing that requirement from the application process.

SOLUTION 3 **Adjust to new norms.** In times of normal labor markets, employers have the upper hand. They sort through dozens of resumes, conduct phone screens with several prospects, and invite a handful to interview in person. In these abnormal times, it is likely some candidates may not show up to a scheduled

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■ How would working at the camp provide an employee with an experience superior to what can be found at any of the other camps within 30 miles?

SOLUTION 4 **Outsource the hiring process.** Ideally, the act of hiring is seamlessly integrated into the lifecycle of a staff member's tenure. Common stages include advertising, applicant tracking, candidate screening, interview scheduling, reference and background checking, job offer wage determination, job offer letter creation, online new hire onboarding, onsite orientation and training, benefits and retirement plan administration, payroll, staff development including performance reviews, workers' compensation insurance, safety training, and exit interview management. Having these stages effectively handled frees up camp owners to spend more time on programming, fundraising, and other activities more closely related to the mission of the facility.

Challenge 2 Managing A Budget

One of the biggest challenges in operating a camp or retreat center is managing a budget for a break-even or better result at year's end. Often, deferred maintenance projects, rising food costs, and staffing benefits and wages add up quickly. Unexpected rental cancellations create a challenge in decreased revenue projections. Keeping the expenditure in line with revenue is essential. It is incredibly important to manage a budget effectively. Here are three solutions:

SOLUTION 1 **Analyze expenditures.** Taking time to do a review of financial statements is a terrific way to get a clear picture of expenditures. When doing so,

communicate with key stakeholders to explain the availability of funds, and identify possible long-term financial issues. Make visuals like charts and graphics to display relevant information. Once there is a fuller picture regarding spending and income, confirm that the camp is using funds appropriately and following a budget that can ward off troubling issues before they occur.

SOLUTION 2 **Streamline processes.** Streamline all accounting/financial services to avoid redundancies. This saves time and resources that are precious to many camps. Some of the items to include are the following:

- The elimination of overlapping employee job responsibilities
- Improvement of accounts-receivable collections (including offering several payment options for better customer service)
- More dependable account-payable services, as well as direct support regarding financial reports
- Property insurance, and when applicable sales tax-related calculations and submissions.

SOLUTION 3 **Refer to the experts.** Managing a budget is essential to the financial success of a camp, even though many owners have little time to manage it along with other financial aspects. Outsourcing this component can not only save money overall, but also makes financial sense.



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Challenge 3 Project Management

Management at camp takes discernment in order to see the best way to approach a project, stay within a budget, and manage all the many moving parts. Since there are typically two types of projects—planned and unplanned—consider the following:

SOLUTION 1 **Hire skilled staff members first.** Utilizing skilled staff to make repairs or replacements is helpful for several reasons. As service calls increase in price, and parts are expensive and in short supply, projects can often be delayed while waiting for materials. Having qualified staff provides an opportunity to manage a timeline and budget more closely, rather than rely on outsourcing all service repairs.

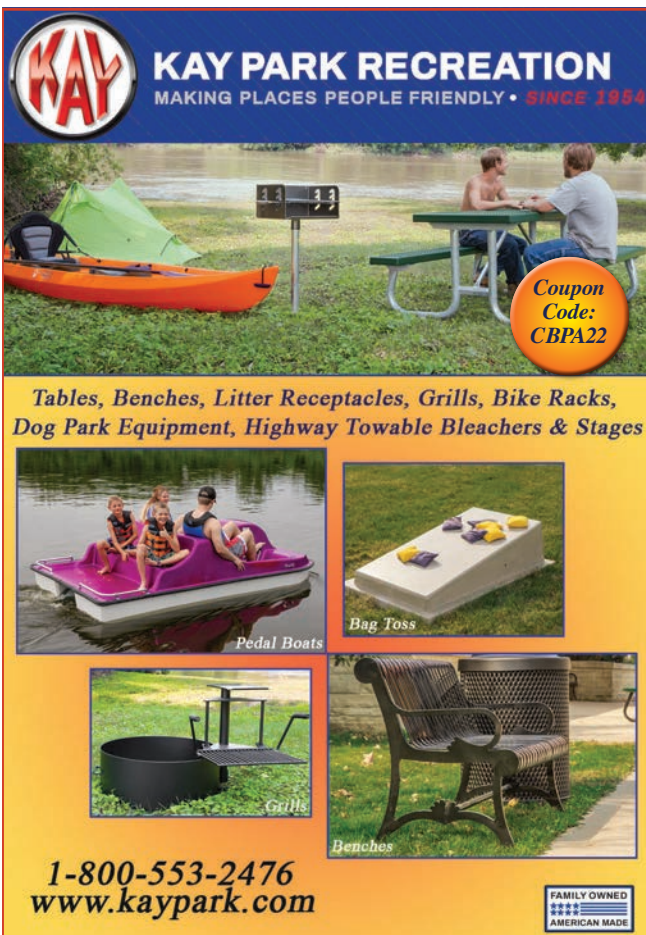
SOLUTION 2 **Be thorough when hiring a contractor.** With projects that do require a licensed contractor, be sure to get references and quotes before agreeing to sign a contract for services. When a contractor is on-site, for risk management purposes and best practices, require that person to provide a copy of vehicle insurance and general-liability insurance. If a contractor has employees, obtain copies of their proof of workers' compensation insurance.

SOLUTION 3 **Incorporate a budget into a timeline.** With more expensive projects, funds may not be immediately available. Putting the project cost into a budget as soon as possible allows an owner to allocate money for a project as the money becomes available.

SOLUTION 4 **Outsource project management.** For those who simply do not have the workforce to manage a project, consider outsourcing to another skilled camp or retreat on-site project-management professional. This can save time and money overall by hiring experienced professionals, who can oversee larger, more involved projects. **CB**

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