



FOR YOUTH DEVELOPMENT®
FOR HEALTHY LIVING
FOR SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

History of the YMCA of Barry County and Camp Algonquin

The YMCA of Barry County has been an integral part of Barry County since 1916. Since its inception, the YMCA has developed programs that have strengthened kids, families, and the community.

In late 1916, six men sat around a dinner table discussing the need for a youth program in Barry County. Before leaving the table, Colonel Emil Tyden, Aben Johnson, M.L. Cook, the two Messer brothers, and Mr. Frandsen had all pledged enough money to hire a YMCA director and finance a youth program for a two year trial period. Once underway, this program continued as a one county, two county, and during the depression, a three county association.

Camping opportunities were offered to Barry County residents using neighboring camps and outdoor recreational areas.

During the 1920's Grand Rapids developers, created a plan to combine Long, Little Dollar, Kurtz, and Dowd Lakes into one large basin called Algonquin Lake. After buying up much of the land and leasing some from Warren Hawkins, the company built a damn across the outlet creek. The damn was built by hand with the help of horses. Once they successfully flooded the basin the developers planned to build a resort. The Depression of 1929 changed their plans and many of the investors received lots surrounding the lake in return for their invested dollars.

At that time the only building on the lake was a small cabin owned by Mr. Peck.

Aben Johnson of Hastings Manufacturing was one of those investors. Upon receipt of the land he approached others, mainly Howard Frost, and proposed that a Y summer camp be built along Lake Algonquin.

Using Hastings Manufacturing money derived from the sales of surplus WW II 20 mm shells, Aben Johnson, Howard Frost, and Bill Bradford - the YMCA camp committee chairman, put up four tents, a Quonset hut, and two outhouses. Camp Algonquin was born.

Bob King, a high school coach, was hired in 1946 to direct the new camp. When asked what his first challenge was as Camp Director, Bob replied, just getting there. Only a wooded path led to the camp at that time.

Bob recalls that he recruited the first class of campers by passing out brochures to youth and parents on a corner in downtown Hastings. At that time a week at camp cost only \$10.

The first summer saw 100 campers participate in a 5-week resident camp experience.

What a summer. Everything was U.S. issued. Army surplus tents, cots, mess kits and utensils, and a Quonset hut that had a kitchen with a dirt floor. A swim dock was constructed and Pudge King, Bob's wife, is credited with clearing the weeds by dragging a cross saw behind the camp's only rowboat.

In 1947, donations were collected from 10 Hastings Manufacturing employees and with this money a Camp Director's cabin was built.

Rotary, Kiwanis, Jaycees and the YMCA Hi Y Clubs donated money so cement floors and wooden walls could be used for the tents.

The Lions and Exchange Clubs built two more cabins and three more lake lots were purchased.

Upkeep of the camp has always been a main concern. In those days, the "Bull Gang" from the Hastings MFG. would come out for a week. A dozen of guys would repair, paint, build, and renovate the camp.

In 1957, the main lodge burned down and was rebuilt using the insurance money and \$16,000 raised from 100 people in the community.

Indian Island was purchased with a \$10,000 grant from the Thornapple Foundation. The island was renamed "Johnson Island" in honor of Aben Johnson.

In 1986, the Thornapple Foundation provided a \$12,000 grant to build the Adventure Center.

In 1990 - 91 the YMCA embarked on a capital campaign to purchase 40 acres of land just north of the camp. The land was to be used for hiking, camping, biking, orienteering, and for future growth of the camp and the YMCA.

The Thornapple Foundation agreed to match the capital campaign up to \$20,000 for this purchase. Over \$80,000 was raised.

In 1991 the boathouse was renovated, a health care facility and staff housing was built, extensive conservation projects were completed, showers were replaced in the lodge and installed in the brown and red bathrooms. The tennis courts were also resurfaced.

In 2001, Camp Algonquin will be 55 years old. Thousands of young men and women have passed through our camp gates and have had an experience of a lifetime. Many of today's campers are the children, grandchildren or great grandchildren of former Camp Algonquin campers.

The camp serves youth through a summer resident and day camp program as well as leadership and team building conferences. The camp's fifty-five year old facility and infrastructure are demonstrably in need of repair, refurbishing and/or replacement. Surveys of campers and their parents have indicated that, while the child had a tremendously positive experience at Camp Algonquin, the facilities did not meet their expectations. Designed to accommodate 54 campers and counselors, it is now typical to find over 90 youth on the property on a summer day. In recent years potential campers have been turned away since additional utilization could not be accommodated without major consequences to the quality of programs, safety of users and stewardship of the Camp's natural resources.

A community survey conducted by the YMCA of the USA in the fall of 1998 confirmed support for the renovation and expansion of the camp. A master plan that was funded by a \$6,000 grant by the Barry Community foundation was completed in July of 2000 and provided the roadmap that Camp Algonquin will into the 21st century.

Highlights of the plan included the:

Construction of seven new cabins that would be built on stilts overlooking the lake. The cabins would be linked together by a boardwalk and would be larger than the present cabins, allowing for larger bunk beds, greater utilization of the cabin space, and some common area. The cabin walls will be built to look rustic. A flip-down shutter will close off screens. Indoor carpeting will give the cabins a warmer feel as well as having space heaters to take the chill of spring and fall evenings. Skylights will be positioned on all four sides of the roof to keep the cabins light and airy. All but two of the older cabins, which will be used as program pods, will either be moved (to rustic campsites built on the land north of Iroquois trail) or taken down.

A Day Camp pavilion, which will double as a rental facility. The building would be open from early April to mid November. A large multipurpose area would be the focal point of the building. The room can be sub-divided. Various support rooms, directors office, storage, toilets, kitchenette, and a porch will surround the building.

The lodge would either be renovated or added on to, or a new lodge would be constructed. In either case, the lodge will be designed for multiple functions including, the dining hall, kitchen, storage, toilets, offices, multipurpose room (which will also serve as a place for severe weather protection for campers), infirmary, nurses quarters, camp reception/registration area, and the camp's toilet and shower facilities. The facility would be constructed for year-round operation.

The master plan also calls for the following:

Be Universally Accessible

Meet the standards as set forth by the American Camping Association

Provide new water supply, underground electrical service, septic field and gas service.

Up-grade parking and provide for overflow parking at peak times.

Construction of an in ground outdoor swimming pool for swim lessons and other water programs adjacent to the main lodge and playing field.

Relocation of the outdoor chapel

Construction of a new Camp Directors residence

Development of an ecology/science/nature resource center.

Construction of trails that can be utilized for hiking, Mt. Biking, and cross-country skiing.

In July of 2000, Earl and Virginia McMullin's and Larry and Earlene Baum's, both who have had their families grow-up at Camp Algonquin contributed the necessary funds that will ensure that the Camp's master plan will become a reality.

Brief History of the Hastings City Youth Council

The Hastings City Youth Council was formed in 1937 as a recreational agency to provide summer playground activities. Thirty interested parents formed the council and raised the money by contributions and WPA grants to provide supervision on the school playgrounds. By 1942 the activities were enlarged to include youth dances and some handicraft classes.

History of the combined YMCA and Youth Council

During 1943, the president of the inactive YMCA and the chairman of the Youth Council called a combined board meeting and invited the public to attend. A discussion centered on the needs of the youth of Hastings. Combining the YMCA and the Youth Council was suggested. The State YMCA was called for advice on this type of merger. The State Director agreed to help in obtaining a local Director, but did not agree with the combination of the YMCA and the City Recreation program.

The Hastings Community Fund agreed to help finance the program and their budgets were included in the 1944 drive.

A YMCA Director was hired in 1944 and a Youth Center (Saxon Castle) type program was started in the old White (now green) School Building. After a two-year trial, the program was discontinued due to expanding school needs and lack of attendance at the Youth Center.

In 1989, the YMCA expanded its operation into the Thornapple Kellogg School area. The United Way gave the YMCA some seed money to get the program started. In the fall of 1991, the United Way requested the YMCA to submit a plan for expanding its programs to the Delton, Middleville, Woodland, and Nashville areas. In February of 1992, the United Way allocated \$21,667 to be utilized to hire a full time YMCA professional that would provide recreational services to the residents of those areas.

The present decentralized program was started in 1946 with a five front plan: 1) Athletic programs, 2) Club programs, 3) Social recreation, 4) YMCA camping, 5) Summer playgrounds. These activities were planned to be held in existing community facilities such as churches, schools city buildings, and city parks.

In 1946 the activities numbered eight and operated on a budget of \$7,450. Today the YMCA's budget is \$611,00, serves almost 7,000 individuals, and conducts over 50 different programs.

Dissolving the Hastings Youth Council

Even though the YMCA of Barry County and the Hastings Youth Council are two separate Corporations, most people in Barry equate them either as the "Y" or as the YMCA. Both Corporations comply with the philosophy and program

guidelines of the YMCA of the USA. Both are governed by two Boards of Directors, have separate financial records, must file separate governmental forms, but conduct programs that utilize a mission statement and staff that are governed jointly.

On December 13, 1999 the Hastings City Council voted to disband the Hastings Youth Council and enter a 4-year contract with the YMCA. The City of Hastings contracted with the YMCA to provide recreational services for Hastings residents. On December 16, the Hastings Youth Council Board of Directors met to dissolve the company and on the same day the YMCA Board of Directors voted to ratify their new bylaws.

Merging both corporations allows the newly formed corporation to be more efficient by saving financial resources (by not duplicating services such as audits, monthly statements, government forms etc.) as well as saving staff and board time.

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