



## EMBRACING THE PAST – BUILDING FOR THE FUTURE



Northeastern Ohio 4-H Camps, Inc.  
7983 S. Wiswell Road  
Windsor, OH 44099  
(440) 272-5275  
[www.4hcampwhitewood.com](http://www.4hcampwhitewood.com)

By

**John P. Parker, Professor Emeritus, The Ohio State University;**  
**Jenna Hoyt, 4-H Extension Educator, The Ohio State University Extension;**  
**Andy Hudak, Executive Director, 4-H Camp WhiteWood;**  
with design help from Kim Howard, Office Associate, The Ohio State University Extension

2020



## **A Troubling Year**

As the waters of Phelps and Grindstone Creek continue to flow down the valleys as they have for centuries, so to do the programs and activities at 4-H Camp Whitewood continue on. Until the year 2020, that is, when the COVID-19 Virus forced the closing of Camp for the year, as it did for all 4-H Camps in Ohio.

Campers at the camp during the year are what provide operating income and some profit. Without camps, there was no income to pay for personnel and maintain camp property or build new facilities. So, the year was a challenging one.

Personnel kept on staff included the Executive Director, a Maintenance Director and, for a short time, a Program Director, who was hired with the understanding that he would go back to teaching in a school until camp was able to open up again. Funds to pay these personnel came from frugal spending, carry over money the Camp Board had been able accumulate and donations as a part of the Ohio State University Buckeye Funder Campaign. Hopefully in 2021, the Camp will be able to get back to normal and have a good year to help offset the loss of income in 2020.



## **A Major Challenge**

During the mid-2006 to 2010 years the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) told the Camp Board that the sewage systems at Camp would not allow continued operation. There were four different septic systems handling the sewage. One for the restrooms on the girl's side of camp, one for the Dining Hall, another for the Staff Lodge and a fourth for the boy's restrooms. All of them were working satisfactorily except for the one handling Dining Hall waste where there was apparently too much water for the system to handle.

Finding a suitable location for a leach bed for the restrooms on the girl's side had been a problem. There was less than two feet of topsoil before there was solid rock so leaching facilities could not be built.

The Sanitarian for the Ashtabula County Health Department, who had to help design and approve leaching facilities, was also a 4-H Advisor so he wanted to be as helpful as possible. After spending several hours looking around the area, he saw the old stone quarry on the edge of the valley fairly close to the potential location of a restroom. He indicated that old quarry could be cleaned out and would be large enough to put in the necessary tile, sand and gravel for the leach bed. Trees about four inches in diameter plus considerable underbrush had to be removed. This was done and the system has worked well. The EPA had said that all four septic systems had to be combined into one central system they had to approve. After the engineering work was done, it was determined this could cost as much as \$400,000 since it was a complicated system. This seemed to be a major obstacle for Camp to raise that much money.

EPA was willing to give the Camp some time to do this as long as they were making the effort to find the necessary funding. Several options were considered. One was to get 4-H members, advisors and friends involved. Another was to go after interested individuals and organizations who would make major donations for a new system. This was the route that was eventually used along with some help from 4-H members and advisors.

Events were held at Camp and possible donors invited to attend. Personal contacts were made and, eventually, enough money was raised to start construction of a new central system.

The new central sewage system was completed and became operational in 2007. Final cost was about \$450,000 with a capacity of 8,000 gallons a day. This is twice as large as is needed right now, but the Camp Board of Directors were looking ahead to future expansion.

Four septic systems at Camp plus the Camp home and Office across the road are all channeled into the system requiring it to be checked regularly by a Licensed Operator with results reported to the EPA.



## Great Fishing

The small pond just off Wiswell Road on the west side that was once used for a water supply was no longer being used. In addition to a fishing pier built in 2018 by 4-H Youth and Eagle Scout Ian Atwell, recently Camp Staff have cleaned the brush and trees out of this water and cleaned it up. It has now turned into a great fishing pond. The addition of this fishing pier has enhanced the joy campers experience of being able to catch 16-inch Bass and other fish from this pond. It adds to the joy of their camping experiencing because fish readily take their bait. It also provides another educational opportunity for discussion of aquatic life and water systems.

## The Lodge

Over the years, major improvements have been made to what used to be called the Craft Building. Originally it was just a straight through wide open post and beam building. It had room for many activities such as square and folk dancing and sleeping facilities for permanent staff and visiting Extension staff when they came with their camps. Also included was a garage and small store. Over the years wings have been added on both sides of the building and the extra floor area concreted to expand the use of the facility.

During the early years of 2000 to 2005 further improvements were made. The entire building was enclosed and paneled with lumber from the camp. A stage was built on the inside at the west end, a small kitchen and restrooms installed, and the building was heated and air conditioned. This was something old-time 4-H campers never expected to see.

Now the building is named the *Grindstone Creek Lodge*. It is used for many other activities along with camping, such as weddings and various meetings all year since it is winterized. Additional use of the building makes an excellent meeting place for conference groups from surrounding counties as well as providing an additional source of income for Camp.



### **Making Maple Syrup**

Around 2010, a new sugar house was built just south of the cabins on the girl's side of camp. It was constructed from lumber cut from selected cutting of Camp trees, and the latest state of the art evaporator was installed. There were about 1,000 taps available for sap for boiling into 4-H Camp Whitewood maple syrup. The syrup was bottled into several sizes of containers for sale at the Camp Store and other outlets.

During those years, special events with breakfast of pancakes, French toast and eggs were open to the public. They provided a source of income as well as brought more people in to get acquainted with camp.

About 2019 the Camp Board of Directors, after studying the operation, decided it was not cost-effective to make Camp syrup and made the tough decision to discontinue the operation. The evaporator and other equipment were sold and the building used for storage with other uses being considered.

Now the Camp Board is exploring conversations with nearby maple producers to exchange the sap from Camp trees for syrup to sell and use at Camp. Having syrup with sap harvested from 4-H Camp Whitewood is still important to the Board to help connect Camp to the people.

## Day Camps

On the west side of the road and south of the home and building that houses maintenance equipment is an old barn. In early 2000 it was remodeled and turned into a Day Camp facility. This was popular with local people as an outlet for young campers on a short -time basis and to provide added income for Camp.

Since more time was available in 2019-2020 more improvements were made to the Day Camp facilities including a new roof and new windows were installed for the facility to be ready when Camp opens up again.

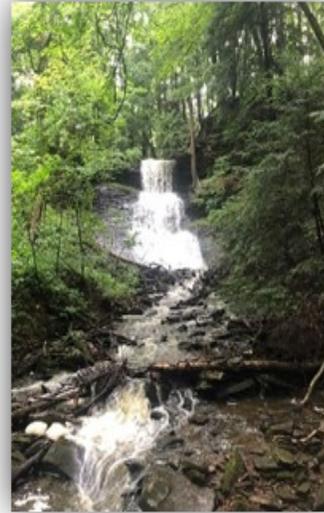
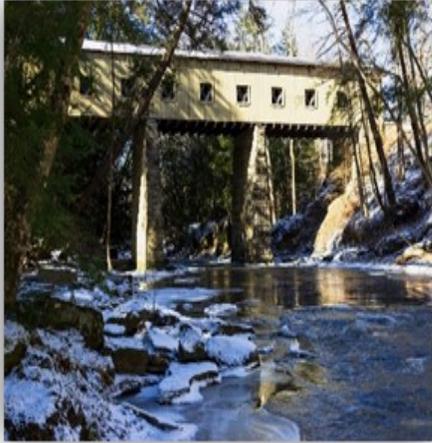


## Keeping Camp in Shape

In 2019 and throughout the years, maintenance of camp facilities is a never-ending job. Since trees cover over most of the buildings, roofs need constant repair and replacement. Additionally, a continuous schedule of mowing is required in order to keep Camp looking great. With the additions made over the years, there are a lot of roofs and siding to check and updates are ongoing.

## Becoming a Greater Part of The Ohio State University

Since Camp was organized by 4-H and OSU Extension personnel, there was an inherent interest in making the Camp Director a member of the University staff. After the Board studied the pros and cons of such a move, it was determined this would be in the best interests of Camp as well as the Executive Director. So, in 1998 the Camp Director position became an official Ohio State University employee as the Camp Executive Director/ Program Manager. Camp Executive Directors since that time have continued to be OSU employees under an employee lease agreement between Camp and the University.



## **Building for the Future**

As the waters of Grindstone Creek flow over the beautiful water falls near the campfire circle, so does the Camp Board of Directors continue to look to the future. Making plans to further develop camp educational programs is essential part of discussions.

The original building on site, the Dining Hall has served its useful life and is in need of replacement in the coming years. This will be another major undertaking once a final plan is reached. History says the present Dining Hall was constructed by bolting sections together in case, for some reason, it had to be moved. This temporary construction has led to challenges in upkeep leading to the need for replacement instead of renovation and updating.

Windows in the original structure were board shutters that were raised up when Camp opened and closed when shut down for the winter. Inside there were canvas shades that could be rolled up or down depending on the weather.

Glass windows, paneling and winterizing the building came after a full time Executive Director was employed. Now, Camp leadership is considering a dining hall replacement that keeps the feel of the original building and camp history.

Long term, the Board hopes some adjacent land will become available to expand and protect the area and further incorporate new changes in programming and facilities.

4-H Camp Whitewood has been an important educational asset to northeastern Ohio for over 80 years. With good planning, it will be operating for at least another 80 to 100 years.



*John Parker is Professor Emeritus with The Ohio State University, Historian and author of "Through the Years at 4-H Camp Whitewood."*



*Jenna Hoyt is Ashtabula County 4-H Youth Development Extension Educator with The Ohio State University and Camp Board President from 2015-2021.*  
[Hoyt.88@osu.edu](mailto:Hoyt.88@osu.edu)



*Andy Hudak is the Executive Director at 4-H Camp Whitewood and has served as Program Manager with The Ohio State University since 2017.*  
[Hudak.65@osu.edu](mailto:Hudak.65@osu.edu)

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The mission of Northeastern Ohio 4-H Camps, Inc. is the educational development of positive and productive life skills accomplished through group interaction in the unique natural environment of the Whitewood campus.