

TO: Pocantico Hills Board of Education
FROM- David Levine, Director PHDC
DATE: September 15,2007
RE: Final Report 2007

On July 5th, over 310 smiling faces emerged from buses and cars at PHDC signifying the beginning of another camp season. This was a season of transition with me being named as the new Camp Director. Although I have more years of camp experience than I would like to admit to, I realized immediately that directing this camp would be a major challenge. After my official appointment by the Board of Education in March, I decided to implement strategies that I hoped would lead to a successful camp season. The fact that 4 different Directors had not survived more than one year was certainly paramount in my mind as I tried to figure out how to stop that trend. I decided to approach the 2007 season in the following way:

- 1. Key personnel meetings-** As the new Director I had to get to know the key administrative people prior to the summer that I would be working with in July and August and they had to get to know me as well. From March through June I worked at the Pocantico School every Tuesday and Thursday morning from 8:30-1:00. I consistently met with JoAnn (payroll), Olive (purchase orders), Patti (busing), Greg and Nunzio (custodial staff), Nurse Harriet, Kevin (computers), Sally (registration), Nina and Linda (kitchen) and Sharon (office). I tried to get as much information about the Pocantico methods as I could before camp began. I would like all of you to know that each one of these people was fantastic. I owe all of them an immense amount of gratitude for their patience, understanding and guidance.
- 2. Staff personnel meetings-** After work, I came back to the school on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 7:00 P.M.-9:30 P.M to conduct interviews with prospective employees and to meet the staff that had already been hired. I arranged separate meetings with all the specialists as well as the head counselors. This allowed me to get to know the staff before the official beginning of the camp season. Mo, Rena, Trish, Stephanie, Matt and Kate were especially helpful and I think you should all be aware of their contributions.
- 3. Laura Hansen-** Laura is the life and spirit of PHDC. She was fantastic to work with in her capacity as Assistant Director. We met over 25 times prior to camp. I must have asked and re-asked her hundreds of questions and she always helped me to understand the intricacies of life at PHDC.

4. Traditions- This is a key word at PHDC. The Camp Parent Committee and the school administration were steadfast in their desire to have PHDC honor the customs and traditions that made PHDC so successful for the past 49 years. Although I had my own ideas about dismissal and various other procedures, I decided to seek the input of the "seasoned" staff members and bring back the fun traditions and spirit that the campers and parents enjoyed. This included Ham and Eggs, Camp Songs, Egg Drop Day, Fantasy Day, etc.

5. Parents- There is no doubt in my mind that parents need and want to be informed about situations and problems that effect their children. I took a very pro-active stance about contacting parents. If a problem occurred between campers or staff members, I immediately telephoned the parents before the children arrived home. If the situation needed a personal meeting, I invited parents into the office to help solve problems. I feel very strongly that the parents appreciated this personal contact because they felt that the camp cared about their problems and worked with them to make the summer an enjoyable one for their children. I met parents in the office, in the parking lot and in the bus circle and no problem was ever overlooked. I made parents feel that they were part of the solution and that we needed there help. This proved to be a successful method of operation.

6. Utilization of Staff- I made it apparent to the staff that I would be very receptive to their input and flexible in establishing routines and procedures as long as the safety of the campers was the primary goal. I always felt that you allow people to do what they do best and utilize their strengths even if it does not exactly conform to the way you might want to do it. I took this approach with the staff and I believe it was extremely successful and led to what in my view was a fantastic summer. I held frequent meetings with Head Counselors and Specialists and together we developed strategies and plans for the special events days, color war, fantasy day, talent show etc. There was never any doubt who was running the meeting but everyone felt free to contribute ideas. This free flow of information was definitely beneficial to the campers.

7. Overall Coordination- **Let me say unequivocally, there are no 2 better people to work with then Dr. Elliott and Jay Scotto-Friedman.** I took up a lot of there time these past 5 months. They gave me tremendous support, guidance and understanding and without their help, the day camp season would not have been as successful as it was.

STAFF NUMBERS- There were 130 staff members this year. This number breaks down in the following way:

Head Counselors in Grades- 13

Junior Counselors in Grades- 45

Specialists- (including the head) 31. This includes all staff in wilderness, studio, athletics, nature, shop, home economics, fun factory, & tennis.

Pool Staff- 18

Director-1

Assistant Directors-2

Pool Director-1

Nurse-1

Camp Secretary-1

Registration Secretary-1

Kitchen-2

CIT'S- 14 (non-paid)

Although PHDC is rampant with tradition, I did institute a number of new programs to give camp a new flavor. These included Banner Day, Wacky Water Day, Club Getaway, Cold Stone Creamery Trip, Crazytime organization, staff attendance daily sign in (for accountability), no staff leaving camp for lunch, counselor choice, behavior policies, etc.

Trips and Overnights- Campers were privileged to go on the following trips in 2007:

Bowling(1,2,4,5,6), Club Getaway(teens), Fahnstock(5th), backpacking(6th), Splashdown(3rd & 4th), Coal Mine(5th), Canoe trip(teens), Overnights (3rd & 4th), Mountain Creek(6th), THE BIKE TRIP (teens), Stepping Stones(K), Dorney Park(6th), Cold Stone Creamery(Pre-K), Yankee Tour(5th).

EXTENDED DAY- FRIDAY

Every Friday morning was a special event. This year for the first time PHDC offered an optional extended day both for campers and staff. This proved to be difficult but successful. There were a number of problems that had to be addressed. There was confusion at dismissal time because many parents changed their mind at the last minute and opted to have their children remain for the full day. I spoke to many parents who originally planned to pick up their children but then changed their mind because the kids were enjoying camp. I refused no one's request to remain in camp and made the best of a difficult staffing situation.

One of the traditions of PHDC is that many Head Counselors go out to lunch on Friday at 12:00 to celebrate the end of the camp week. This tradition continually forced me to make numerous program and staff changes. I made sure that each group had a mature adult by assigning athletic, wilderness, and specialty staff to replace the Head Counselors. Although this provided me with an adult in every group, each of these staff members did not really know all of

the children. Fortunately, the junior counselors stepped up and assumed much of the responsibilities while under the watchful eye of the adults. Since only about 50% of the staff remained on Friday afternoons, it necessitated a change in the program. This was accomplished by having a full camp swim from 12:20-1:20. After changing from swim and getting a snack, the rest of the day was organized with one period from 1:45-2:30. I had the specialists take their groups to their own specialty so they could be involved in familiar activities and had the remaining groups either playing in the gym or having a counselor choice activity. Everyone was actively engaged and we had no safety problems. The numbers did change every week but approximately 275 campers remained every week for the extended day.

CAMP PROGRAM- The daily camp program consisted of many of the traditional activities that are offered in day camps. Specialists organized learning experiences in Nature, Athletics, Wilderness, Swim, Home Economics, Fun Factory, Studio, Wood Shop, Music, Tennis, etc.

Specialty Days included Opening Ceremonies, Hat and Tie Day, Color War, Fantasy Day, Hall of Records Day, Apache Relay, Egg Drop Day, Camper Talent Show/Camp Video, Banner Day, Wacky Water Day etc. All of these days were successful and generated fun and smiling faces for both campers and staff.

ORIENTATION- A 2 day orientation was held for all staff in June. Safety procedures were stressed and outlined. I invited Kate to speak on swim procedures, Harriet (health issues), Patti (bus procedures), Jo Ann (payroll and fingerprinting), etc. John Eichele, an Assistant Director discussed child abuse issues using his experience as a School Union Representative.

STAFF MEETINGS- These were held every Monday afternoon and were mandatory with attendance taken.

CAMP SHOW- The camp show was held in the old bus circle on a Wednesday evening. The banners created by all the grades for Banner Day were displayed in the school windows. Parents, relatives, friends were all invited. All grades performed at least one number and the evening was a huge success. I had many parents come up to me after the hour show was over asking for it to be longer next year. So many parents came to the show that extra chairs had to be taken from the school and placed on the lawn. The entire staff collected all the chairs at the conclusion of the show, That was just another example of the great

camaraderie and cooperation that existed among the staff members, They are to be commended.

SAFETY- Safety was stressed from the first day I took over as Director. In any camp with over 300 children, accidents will occur. We were very fortunate this year that aside from the normal scrapes, bumps and bites we had only one major injury at the campsite. The head of Athletics, Matt Kleiman broke his clavicle while playing capture the flag. Two campers were injured on the bike trip and were treated at the emergency room of an upstate hospital. Nurse Harriet did a great job taking care of the assortment of minor problems. The Department of Health visited the camp twice and the visits resulted in commendations for our procedures. At the suggestion of the schools legal counsel we had to call the Child Abuse Hotline for a suspected case of possible child abuse. The case proved to be false but we obeyed the law by calling the proper authorities and letting them conduct the investigation.

CONCERNS-

1. **Optional Friday-** This should **NOT continue for staff or campers.**
Dismissal should be at 12:00 for everyone or at 3:00 for everyone. Although it all worked out safely, there was too much confusion between busing, rec, swim team, parent pickup, changes, lack of parental information etc. I urge the Board to make a decision on this issue immediately. Waiting until the spring is not in anyone's best interest.
2. **Staff Attendance-** Camp was only 27 days this year. Absences should have been minimal, but this was not the case. It was very annoying to me. I made it very plain to the staff that should I be returning as the Director, I would be hiring people not only based on performance but also attendance. The positive side of this was that because I demanded all staff to sign in everyday on an attendance sheet, we have a complete record of absences. I made it very plain to staff that if you were absent you were going to lose salary for that day. PHDC saved a considerable amount of money this summer on salary losses due to absences. These numbers were given to Jo Ann so proper deductions could be made. I also hired very few substitutes so money was saved there also.
3. **The Office-** The camp office was always bristling with activity. I shared the space with the 2 Assistant Directors, the nurse, the secretary, wilderness staff and athletic staff. This situation had both positive and negative effects. It was good because it was the hub of all camp activity and all the key meetings took place where I could be a part of them. It was a problem because of the lack of privacy. As I mentioned before, I used the phones

extensively to speak to parents and too many conversations were overheard. **The Director of a camp needs a private accessible phone to conduct business.** The nurse also needs a private area to treat ill or injured campers. The last problem was air conditioning. The camp office was a **sauna**. It had to be 90-100 degrees in there on most days. This was very bad for ill children. Parents who came to the office commented on the hot conditions. Repairs have to be made.

4. Camp Calendar- The dates of the camp season should be decided immediately. Waiting until the spring is not in the best interests of parents, staff or campers. I believe in proper long range planning and this can only be done if this situation is clarified in October.

RECOMMENDATIONS- There are a number of different issues that need to be addressed in order for the camp to grow and prosper while maintaining the high quality of activity, safety and staff. These include the following:

- A-** Salaries- In order to compete with other camps and to attract the best employees possible the pay schedule should increase. Since there is also a strong possibility that Fridays will be full days, this also must be taken into account when paying staff members.
- B-** Tuition- There should be a rise in tuition for both residents and non residents
- C-** Activity Fees- There should be NO separate activity fee. All fees should be included in the tuition and collected prior to camp. This will eliminate the extra work associated with attempting to collect these fees once camp has started. The tuition can be different for each age group depending on an estimate of the cost associated with the trips.
- D-** Staff Structure- A Director and 2 Assistant Directors should be on the staff. One Assistant Director should be involved with parental dropoff and pickup in the parking lot, just like we had last year. Many issues were addressed and resolved in the morning and afternoon by the fact that there was adult presence to answer questions and deal with problems.
- E-** Morning Snack- A morning snack such as a small granola bar should be given. This can also be factored into the increase in tuition.
- F-** Bus Attendance- A procedure should be put into place to take attendance as the children come off the buses in the morning.
- G-** 2008- The reality is that camp is not and should not be treated as if it is a 2 month operation. Most day camps begin there planning in October. It is recommended that the position of Director be addressed immediately.
- H-** Camp applications, mailers, camp fees- All this should be decided and completed immediately. There have been a number of parental calls requesting info for 2008. Telling parents to look at the website is NOT the

way to generate new business. This camp needs to be treated like a business. It is also recommended that a camp Secretary be employed year round to get a list of names of prospective campers. There is competition out there and PHDC needs to do everything it can to compete. This can include discounts for early registrations as well as discounts for recommendations that enroll.

I- Meet the Director Evening- A meeting should take place in early April to generate business by meeting the key staff members

J- In House Registration Days- These are not necessary. Parents can come in anytime to drop off enrollment forms. Last year only a handful of parents came on the 2 evenings. This was a waste of money.

K- Money Savings- In addition to the raise in tuition there are a number of other suggestions I have for reducing the budget. I inherited a number of situations where 2 adults were in charge of a specialty area. This is not necessary. All that is needed is one adult and either a junior counselor or mature CIT. This can save thousands of dollars. I also believe we should create a new position known as Assistant Head Counselor which would be a training position for a future Head Counselor and allow PHDC to pay a lower salary then if we had to hire an additional Head. The last and most radical suggestion I have refers to days off. As I mentioned before it irks me that staff uses employment time to go on family vacations. The attorneys that represent the school district will have to check this out but I would like to see staff docked 2 days for each day off they take. If this is legal, I recommend that staff be required to sign a document stating the day off policy and loss of money. This policy can also be at the discretion of the Director.

Your consideration of these recommendations would be appreciated.

REVENUE VS. EXPENSES

Camp revenue totaled \$279,929.80 while expenses incurred were \$312,280.05. Camp operated at a deficit of \$14,353.25. Obviously, this is not acceptable. The recommendations I have included are designed to result in a positive cash flow.

I have also attached a breakdown of the camper enrollment, which was prepared by Sally Goldberg.

In conclusion, I would just like to again thank all the people that helped make the 2007 camp season a rewarding one for both me and all the campers.

Sincerely,


David Levine

