

SHERWOOD FOREST CAMP INC.

Strategic Plan 2008-13

The Future of Camp Experiences for St. Louis Underserved Children

Remember When

Think back to the days of summer when you were a child. Hopefully, you have fond memories of long days outside, playing with friends, riding bikes, chasing the ice-cream truck. Maybe evenings were spent playing tag, hide-and-seek, or catching lightening bugs in a jar. Whatever games you played, you never went inside until the streetlights came on and your mother called you by your whole name.

If you were fortunate, your summer included family vacations in a crowded station wagon and a baseball game when the Cardinals were in town.

But, if you were really lucky, some of your memories of summer include a long trip on a bus, train, or plane to camp! That was always the best place to be in the summer. It was where you would reconnect with your best friends, where you learned to master the backstroke, how to portage a canoe, build a one match fire, hit the bulls eye, make a three poled puppet, and sleep under more stars than anyone who has never been to camp could possibly imagine. Think of all the really important things you learned in the summers of your childhood.

Reality for Our Campers

Now picture a summer spent indoors. Even if you don't know the difficult details of the lives of some of our campers, understand that many of them do not have any summer memories like yours: no simple joys of children's play under the watchful eyes of revered counselors or the listening ears of a street full of mothers.

The Importance of Sherwood Forest Camp

That's why Sherwood Forest Camp is so important to our campers; it is their place for childhood. It is the best place many of them have ever been, their most treasured space and time. Not one of the children who lives in poverty chose to be born into a family of limited means, just the same as the children who are fortunate enough to be born into a family of privilege.

For 70 years, Sherwood Forest Camp has increased the opportunities and changed the lives of thousands of underserved children in our community.

SHERWOOD FOREST CAMP INC.

Strategic Plan 2008-13

The Future

In 1937, the leaders of the St. Louis Park and Playground Association made a leap of faith that, with support from the existing camp community and just \$2000, a camp program could be created to serve 600 children. In 1978, the leaders of Sherwood Forest Camp took destiny into their own hands and bought a camp facility with only one habitable building and six months of time to make a new home.

We stand at the precipice of the third opportunity, and the largest challenge, in the history of our camp. When we adopt this Strategic Plan at the end of 2007, we are committed to making sweeping changes to our summer program. This will require us to undertake an enormous fundraising effort that will take commitment, energy, determination, and no small amount of guts and grit to bring it to successful completion.

Take a close look at all the children in our community who live in poverty. We don't know their names, but they are our children too. Let's take this third big step to build a camp and program that will stand for the ages, and be the place for these kids' childhoods, the best place many of them have ever been, their most treasured space and time.

SHERWOOD FOREST CAMP INC.

Strategic Plan 2008-13

The Organization's History

Our Roots

The roots of Sherwood Forest Camp can be found in the early 1900's when a group of civic leaders began raising money to distribute free ice-cream to children on one summer Sunday each year in Forest Park. From that simple and single-minded purpose have come two organizations that have made their mark on the St. Louis community. The civic leaders who gave ice-cream to children realized that those children lacked safe and accessible places for recreation. They formed the St. Louis Park and Playground Association to advocate for and develop plans for city park and recreation facilities.

Creating a Camp

During the Great Depression, leaders of the St. Louis Park and Playground Association worked with the Works Progress Administration (WPA) to develop plans for group camps being built by the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC). When the camps, in what was to become Cuivre River State Park 60 miles north of St. Louis, were completed the St. Louis Parks and Playground Association was given the opportunity to conduct a camp program at one of the facilities. Sherwood Forest Camp's first summer was 1937. That first summer's program was conducted for 600 children from St. Louis area agencies and settlement houses with an entirely volunteer staff and a budget of only \$2000 for food and cooks.

A New Mission and Location

By the 1950's the organization's mission was only related to its camp programs, so the name was changed to Sherwood Forest Camping Services. For 41 years, camp programs took place at the leased facility in Cuivre River State Park, but by the 1970's, the facility was in great need of repair and its use limited by demands from competing organizations. In 1978 the Board of Directors completed a two-year search process and purchased the Wiggins Ozark Camp on 487 acres of land in Reynolds County. Since the summer of 1979, Sherwood Forest Camp's programs have operated at this site.

A Leader in Recreation and Youth Development

Sherwood Forest Camp is a leader in the field of recreation and youth development. It was named a 2007 FOCUS St. Louis "What's Right With the Region" Honoree for Improving Racial Equality and Social Justice. Its Leadership Training Program received the coveted Eleanor Eels Award for Program Excellence from the American Camp Association (ACA) in 2006.

SHERWOOD FOREST CAMP INC.

Strategic Plan 2008-13

Leadership Training Program

The Leadership Training Program is over 60 years old with graduates who have become teachers, social workers, police officers, doctors, psychologists and college professors. The current program is a four-year experience that incorporates adventure and wilderness camping activities, community service, and visits to college campuses. The community service component has been described by ACA leaders as a “one-of-a-kind” opportunity for adolescent campers to make a significant contribution toward improving the lives of others.

Continued Contact

Continued Contact is a school year follow-up program for summer campers. Created in 1974, the program recognized that children would benefit from school year contacts with staff and friends to reinforce the positive lessons learned during their summers at camp. Since then, thousands of campers in small groups have spent weekends at Sherwood Forest where they assume most of the responsibility by determining the daily schedules, choosing their activities, planning menus and doing all of the cooking.

The Current Summer Program

Sherwood Forest’s primary purpose continues to be providing summer camp experiences for children from economically disadvantaged families in the St. Louis region. Summer Camp includes Mini Camp for 7-9 year olds, Boys and Girls Camps for 9-13 year olds, and Leadership Training for 13-16 year olds. Over 30,000 children have grown up through summer camp experiences at Sherwood Forest.

School Year Initiatives

While summer camp is Sherwood Forest’s primary program, other programs that address community needs and utilize the camp facilities have been developed over the years.

The Outdoor Education movement in the St. Louis region began at Sherwood Forest Camp in 1948 with programs for the Clayton and St. Louis Public School Districts. The Clayton School District’s Outdoor Education Program continues to operate at Sherwood Forest Camp. In 1984, Sherwood Forest, working collaboratively with Grace Hill Neighborhood Services and St. Louis City and County Homeless Services, created a model “Family Camp” program to address the needs of distressed families.

Through these two school year initiatives, thousands of children’s educational curricula have been enriched by “school camp” programs. Hundreds of families dealing with the stresses of poverty and homelessness have found support and respite through “family camp” experiences.

SHERWOOD FOREST CAMP INC.

Strategic Plan 2008-13

Background and Rationale

In 2006, our Board of Directors decided to undertake a year-long process to write a new Strategic Plan. At the same time, one of our former campers offered to underwrite the costs of a Master Site Plan. This was very timely, as the board and professional staff recognized that the impetus of this new strategic plan was program improvement, and that program improvements would likely have consequences for campsite development.

The Goal

The goal of our strategic plan is to provide long-term program opportunities for our campers.

The Reasons

We want to make this fundamental change to our programs for several reasons:

- 1.) There is a growing body of research on the effect of summer learning on children's cumulative learning. As noted by the Center for Summer Learning at Johns Hopkins University, educators have long observed a phenomenon known as the "summer slide" which is the loss of some knowledge that occurs over the course of summer vacation. More recent research has examined this phenomenon in greater detail. While all children tend to lose some level of factual and procedural knowledge over the summer vacation, there are significant differences across socio-economic levels. Children in middle class and affluent families often participate in "enrichment" programs or activities such as camp, which support and encourage summer learning, including reading for knowledge or pleasure. Children from low-income families are frequently not involved in any programs or are only participating in remedial programs during the summer. Children from middle class and affluent families return to school in the fall having maintained or increased their reading levels, while children from low income families often lose reading skills. These summer learning gains and losses are cumulative and account for a significant portion of the difference in reading skills in children across socio-economic strata.
 - 2.) Research findings from studies conducted jointly by the American Camp Association and Youth Development Strategies, Inc., also indicate that programs with session lengths of four weeks or more saw the greatest gains in growth and learning at camp. This research was conducted over a three-year period and included camps (including Sherwood
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SHERWOOD FOREST CAMP INC.

Strategic Plan 2008-13

Forest Camp) with shorter- and longer-term programs. The research found that across all measured domains, there were higher percentages of children in four-week or longer programs with optimal levels in supportive relationships, sense of safety, youth involvement, and skill building. These same camps with longer sessions showed statistically significant gains in three of the four domains: supportive relationships, sense of safety and skill building.

- 3.) For more than 10 years, Sherwood Forest campers have been able to choose some activities on an individual basis. Called YO (your option), this was a very popular component of campers' summer experiences. Based on camper feedback, in 2005 Sherwood Forest began expanding individual choices in summer camp activities. "Choose Your Own Adventure" allocated three of twelve days for individually determined activities. This time was increased to five days the next summer and eight days in 2007. These changes to the program were made in consultation with campers through end-of-summer meetings with the camp director.
- 4.) Having more choices in short-term sessions makes decision-making for some campers difficult because there are so many things they would like to try, but so little time available. For the past two years, in end-of-summer meetings with our camp director, campers have been clamoring for longer periods of time at camp. Campers tell us they need a sustained period of time in order to master skills, progress in their learning, and reap the long-term benefits of their experiences. Currently, campers find that the length of time they are at camp enables them to advance, but not master, their skills.

What This Means for the Future

For these four reasons, we concluded that in order to offer the level and quality of enrichment programs our campers want and need, longer camp sessions are required. In order to be able to transition to those longer-term programs, Sherwood Forest must make significant improvements and expansions to its campsite. If we move to longer term programs without them, the number of children we could serve would drop from approximately 500 to almost half of that number. A smaller number of campers would hinder the ability to have adequate staff to offer a broad range of activity choices, since the number of staff needed is directly tied to the number of campers.

SHERWOOD FOREST CAMP INC.

Strategic Plan 2008-13

How the Plan was Developed

Toward the end of 2006, the Board of Directors formed a Strategic Planning Committee comprised of five working groups: Program, Campsite, Finance and Fund Development, Governance, and Administration. Each working group was led by a team of board and staff members. The Program working group was headed by Nardie Stein and camp director, Michael Castulik; Campsite by Don Olson and site manager, Gary Chastain; Finance and Fund Development by Ed Becker and director of development, Jim Cornbleet; Governance by current and past board presidents Betsey Comfort and Ted Isaacs, and Administration by Bob Buenger and executive director, Mary Rogers. The Strategic Planning committee was chaired by Don Olson.

The Program working group needed to complete its work first, with Campsite following, based on the needs of the program. Finance and Fund Development came next with Governance completing its work in the early fall, and Administration just before submission of the completed plan to the committee as a whole. Although each working group had a unique assignment, none could work entirely independently. The group that had the largest membership and needed the most number of meetings was the Campsite working group. Its work was done in conjunction with Fred Powers and Bill Bowersox, the principals of the architectural firm, Powers Bowersox Associates, Inc., and the consultants they hired to complete technical portions of the Master Site Plan.

In October 2007 the entire plan was reviewed for approval by the Strategic Planning Committee. At a special meeting in early November 2007 the Committee presented the plan to the Board of Directors for approval.

Summary: “Good to Great”

When the Board of Directors undertook the writing of this Strategic Plan, they did so to transform a good camp program into a great one. They recognized that for many of the children we serve, camp is the single most important, influential, and transformative experience of their childhood. In order to use the power of that experience to ensure positive long-term outcomes for our campers, Sherwood Forest’s Board of Directors has committed itself and the Camp’s professional staff to the hard work of implementing a visionary Strategic Plan and very ambitious Master Site Plan.

SHERWOOD FOREST CAMP INC.

Strategic Plan 2008-13

The Foundation of Sherwood Forest Camp

Core Belief

We believe that the camp experience is the most powerful educational youth development opportunity for young people.

Vision

At Sherwood Forest, children from underserved communities in the St. Louis region have camp experiences that are of the highest quality.

Mission

Sherwood Forest enriches lives through camp experiences.

Guiding Principles

- It is through long-term relationships connecting Sherwood Forest, its campers, and their families that the camp experience has its impact. Our campers have opportunities throughout childhood and adolescence to participate in progressive camp experiences of sustained duration.
- There are opportunities for former campers and staff to continue their relationship with Sherwood Forest Camp in a variety of roles, including volunteer and staff leadership positions.
- We are a community resource primarily for low and moderate income families in the St. Louis region.
- Life-long relationships with our stakeholders are integral to our success.

Key Assumptions

- Our campers benefit from extended time at camp each summer, and from being able to return to camp for as many as ten successive summers. Campers also have opportunities for ongoing connections through our school year Continued Contact program.
 - Sherwood Forest is a traditional resident camp with these familiar hallmarks: primarily single gender programs, an emphasis on outdoor living experiences in a simple rustic camp facility, individually chosen activities from numerous, varied, and developmentally appropriate choices.
 - Our Leadership Training Program, created in 1942, is a nationally recognized model of highly effective youth development for adolescents and the culminating experience for our campers.
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SHERWOOD FOREST CAMP INC.

Strategic Plan 2008-13

- A Counselor-In-Training (CIT) Program follows Leadership Training. Graduates of the CIT Program are encouraged and supported to continue their connections to camp through summer employment at camp.
- Learning and the transferability of learning are central to all of our camp activities. Our campers benefit from the high expectations we have for them, our partners, and ourselves.
- The long-term impact of growing up at Sherwood Forest Camp is becoming a responsible adult with the educational background, skills, and resources to achieve economic self-sufficiency, healthy family and social relationships, and meaningful connections within the community.

Strategic Partners and Relationships

We partner with schools and other organizations in the region with shared beliefs in high-quality programs, high expectations for youth, and long-term commitments to their constituents. These institutions provide a doorway to children who can benefit from camp experiences; our primary relationships remain with children and their families.

During the spring and fall we partner with schools and organizations to provide innovative educational programs that support and enhance learning.

Our membership in the family of United Way agencies is one of our oldest and most important partnerships.

We are members of and our camp programs are accredited by the American Camp Association, the nationally recognized organization of camp professionals.

The members of our Board of Directors live in our community and serve as trustees of the organization on behalf of the community.

We rely on the generosity of people and organizations in and around the St. Louis community to support our work.

SHERWOOD FOREST CAMP INC.

Strategic Plan 2008-13

Program Changes

Over the next several years, in conjunction with the implementation of the Master Site Plan, we envision that our summer camp program will evolve from short-term sessions for campers to more enriched, long-term sessions.

Critical to this Change: Facility Expansion

The implementation of the Master Site Plan is critical to making necessary program changes. Central to these changes is the transition from two boys' and two girls' sessions to one for boys and one for girls. Without significant improvements to the site, the ability to offer the level and number of enriched activity options, as well as to serve a critical number of children, is greatly diminished.

We propose growing from a three village to a four village camp, with increased capacity in one of the existing villages.

This expansion of capacity makes it possible to increase the number of children in camp at one time. Increased capacity is not driven by a desire just to serve many campers, but rather, the recognition that, in order to increase activity choices within the camp program, we need enough staff to teach all of the proposed activities.

Change in Mini Camp

One of our current challenges is being able to adequately meet the developmental needs of a wide age range of campers. For this reason, Mini Camp for 1st, 2nd and 3rd graders, now operating concurrently with all of the other summer programs, will be moved to its own session at the end of the summer.

Revised Session Lengths

The revised summer program will have three sessions serving almost 500 campers:

- One 24-day session for 168 boys in the 3rd to 9th grades
- One 24-day session for 168 girls in the 3rd to 9th grades
- One 4-6 day Mini Camp session for 128 boys and girls in the 1st, to 3rd grades
- A Counselor-In-Training program for 24 boys and girls in the 10th grade.

The Boys and Girls Camp programs will be separated by a short break, as will Girls Camp and Mini Camp. The length of the breaks and the length of the Mini Camp program will be determined by the amount of summer season available with elementary, secondary and post-secondary students out of school.

SHERWOOD FOREST CAMP INC.

Strategic Plan 2008-13

Cabin Groups

Each grade level of 3rd through 9th grade campers in Boys and Girls Camps will have 24 campers or three groups. Three cabin groups of 3rd graders will live in Shire Village, three groups each of 4th and 5th graders will live in Sycamore Springs, three groups each of 6th and 7th graders in a new village to be built just north of Shantoah, and three groups each of 8th and 9th graders in the Leadership Training Program will live in Shantoah. Between 12 and 24 Counselors in Training (CITs) who have finished the 10th grade will be at camp all summer. These CITs will live in cabins with younger campers of their same gender or in a cabin together in Shire Village when campers of the opposite gender are in camp.

Third Graders

Third graders in Shire Village will learn basic skills in camp: outdoor living skills for cabin group camp-outs, swimming and canoeing to a basic skill level. They will also be able to choose other activities from a wide, but not all-inclusive, range of options. This limitation helps to keep a focus on learning basic skills, whets the appetite for returning to camp, and acknowledges that being able to do some activities is something earned by skill development and increasing maturity.

Fourth and Fifth Graders

Campers in Sycamore Springs who have finished the 4th or 5th grades will have a wider range of activity choices, including camping trips of 3 – 4 days in length, based on skill levels and personal interest. Many of the activity choices now available to Sycamore campers will remain at the core of this program; the longer session will provide more time to develop skills and to participate in multiple trips.

Sixth and Seventh Graders

The campers in the new village who have completed the 6th or 7th grades will have even more choices open to them, based on their interests. Opportunities for longer trips of 5 – 8 days will be available: backpacking, canoeing and/or biking in Missouri on the Ozark Trail, the Current River, and the Katy Trail, with possibilities for more extensive and wider ranging trips for campers with very high interest and skill levels. Campers in this new village will have the choice to participate in components of what are now the beginning two levels (Challenge and Trek) of our current Leadership Training Program.

Eighth and Ninth Graders

Campers in Shantoah will have finished the 8th or 9th grades. These campers will be participating in the Leadership Training Program, which will revert to a two year experience. Campers in Leadership Training will be carefully selected from candidates among the Sherwood Forest camper population, as well as from schools and agencies in the region. Any revisions to the program will be based on best practices among our

SHERWOOD FOREST CAMP INC. Strategic Plan 2008-13

colleagues in the camp profession who serve similar constituencies in leadership training programs, as well as the latest research findings on adolescent development. In order to have a Leadership Training Program with a powerful and life-long impact, we want to make explicit and intentional linkages to learning in camp, education, and life-long learning.

Counselors-In-Training

One recommendation under consideration is to remove Counselor-In-Training from Leadership Training and give it its own year, a transition year from camper to staff. CITs would be 16-year-olds who have completed the 10th grade and the Leadership Training Program. CITs would be in camp all summer long. Depending on the size of the total group, there would be one or two staff members as the CIT director/s.

CITs of the same gender as the campers would live in cabins with younger kids; their focus would be on learning and practicing the skills of being a counselor. CITs of the opposite gender would live together in the Shire Village and focus their learning on the skills associated with the role of an activity instructor. While most of the time would involve direct experience, additional meetings and activities facilitated by the CIT director/s would help these adolescents process and focus their learning experiences.

Another key difference from past practices at this level, would be to remove the fee to participate, and pay a stipend to each CIT at the end of the summer for completion of the program. Historically, it is very difficult to keep talented Leadership campers involved all the way through the program because of the economic pressures on 16-year-olds to get a job. This shift could address that challenge.

SHERWOOD FOREST CAMP INC.

Strategic Plan 2008-13

Core Activities, Special Projects, and Focus on the Future

With 21 cabin groups and 168 campers in camp for 24 days, having a variety of choices in a range of skill levels will be essential. For the purposes of description, we are making an arbitrary distinction between Core Activities, which would be stable regular parts of summer camp; Special Projects, which would include residences taught by specialists who come to camp for a period of time; and Focus on the Future, which would include special interest workshops not typically found in camp programs.

Core Activities

Adventure/Challenge Initiatives Low ropes course Tango Tower Team building games Aquatics Canoeing – lake and river Fishing Funyaks Rowboats Swimming – lessons/recreational Library Reading	Nature Ecology Native plants and animals Rocks and geology Stars and astronomy Weather and climate Wetlands, streams and rivers Outdoor Living Skills Caving Fire building Hiking Orienteering Outdoor cooking Shelter building Tool and rope craft	Performing Arts Dance Drama Drumming Music Sports Archery Four square Horseshoes Kickball Soccer Softball/baseball Volleyball Visual Arts Painting and drawing Photography Pottery Sewing Woodworking
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Special Projects

Arts Puppetry Printmaking Videography	Adventure/Challenge Climbing and rappelling	Many others Hands on science
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Focus on the Future

Architecture Business Economics Engineering Entrepreneurship	Finance History Law Literature Medicine	Philanthropy Public service Science
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The goals, objectives and timelines for the Program Plan are detailed on an enclosed spreadsheet.

SHERWOOD FOREST CAMP INC.

Strategic Plan 2008-13

Campsite

A detailed Master Site Plan developed in collaboration with members of the Board of Directors, the professional staff, and the architectural firm of Powers Bowersox Associates, Inc., led by Fred Powers and Bill Bowersox is attached to the Strategic Plan.

The goals, objectives and proposed timelines of the Campsite Plan are detailed on an enclosed spreadsheet.

SHERWOOD FOREST CAMP INC.

Strategic Plan 2008-13

Finance and Fund Development

In order to implement this Strategic Plan and Master Site Plan, financial policies, procedures, and plans to raise operational and capital funds must be developed and implemented.

Human Resources

As these endeavors move forward, Sherwood Forest Camp must also ensure that additional human resources are in place. This will be discussed in the Administrative portion of this plan.

Quality Standards

The Financial Management and Fund Development procedures of the Camp will meet or exceed the Quality Standards of the United Way of Greater St. Louis.

The goals, objectives and timelines for the Finance and Fund Development Plan are detailed on an enclosed spreadsheet.

SHERWOOD FOREST CAMP INC.

Strategic Plan 2008-13

Governance

In order to effectively govern and ensure adequate resources, Sherwood Forest Camp needs an active Board of Directors comprised of knowledgeable, dedicated, well-known, and respected community leaders.

Board Leadership

The governance structure of the Board should allow for a nimble leadership team comprised of the members of the Executive Committee. This group of key leaders will provide direction but will not act independently of the Board. It is also important that our constituents' voices be heard by the members of the Board. This can be accomplished in several ways.

The Responsibilities of the Board of Directors

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- The Board of Directors:
 - sets the strategic direction of the camp,
 - establishes policies,
 - ensures resources to meet the strategic needs of the camp, and
 - provides oversight and accountability to the community.
 - The Board of Directors is responsible for cultivating, recruiting, orienting, and educating its members.
 - The Board of Directors hires, sets performance goals, and annually evaluates the performance of the Executive Director.

Individual Board Member Responsibilities

Each board member represents the camp in the community, serves as an advocate on behalf of the camp, and supports and cultivates support for the camp in its fundraising goals in order to ensure adequate resources.

Quality Standards

The Governance of the Camp will meet or exceed the Quality Standards of the United Way of Greater St. Louis.

The goals, objectives and timelines for the Governance Plan are detailed on an enclosed spreadsheet.

SHERWOOD FOREST CAMP INC.

Strategic Plan 2008-13

Administration

The operations of Sherwood Forest Camp are the responsibility of the professional staff. This staff leadership team acts under the direction of the Executive Director.

Professional Staff Responsibilities

The professional staff is responsible for developing and implementing programs that follow the strategic direction set by the board in response to community needs. Additionally, the staff ensures that the operations of the camp are conducted in compliance with applicable federal, state, and local laws and regulations.

Quality Accredited Programs

Programs conducted by Sherwood Forest Camp meet or exceed the Accreditation Standards of the American Camp Association. Programs and Administration of the camp will also meet or exceed the Quality Standards of the United Way of Greater St. Louis.

Staff and Board Relationship

The Executive Director works closely with the Board of Directors to ensure that adequate resources are available to effectively administer the functions of the camp, to provide quality services, and to ensure wise stewardship of its resources.

The goals, objectives and timelines for the Administration Plan are detailed on an enclosed spreadsheet.