

# MINIKANI ALUMNI COMMUNITY

# NEWSLETTER

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Thanks To: Perry LaRoque, Brian Siegel, and Neil Willenson

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## “Come Home to Minikani”

At the Alumni Weekend in August there were ten dedicated people interested in serving on the Alumni Board of Directors. The interim board decided that there was no need for an official election. Those in attendance were asked to endorse the new board, which they did, setting the wheels in motion for a 2<sup>nd</sup> year of the Minikani Alumni Community.

What came next was bound to happen. Just as we were patting ourselves on the back for doing such a good job the past year – our ‘Inaugural’ year, it suddenly hit us: We have to do it all over again. I’m sure you can relate – You’ve just had a great cabin of 2-weekers, and it is Sunday afternoon at about 2:30. You look around the cabin and see 8 new, apprehensive faces looking right back at you, and that’s when it hits: You have to do it all over again, only this time even better, and with more enthusiasm.

Are we up to the task? You bet! At our first official welcome to the Board, Perry LaRoque, Director, put it this way:

“We had an incredibly successful Alumni Weekend and those in attendance can attest to the positive energy and excitement we felt from a freshly reunited and reconnected Alumni. They are counting on us to bring everyone home and I believe it should be our mission to encourage every alumni to *Come Home to Minikani*. We have access to such an amazing pool of talent, nobility, friendship, and love; I hope we seize the opportunity to bring that all home, so together we can become the people we had envisioned during each of our rag ceremonies. I feel honored to be a custodian to that energy, and I hope you see your unique and fortunate role within this mission.”

So hang on to your hats, Alumni. With your help and support, we’ve got another great year ahead of us.



## New Totem Poles

The history is pretty sketchy at this point, but the best minds (so far) think that sometime in the 1950's two large totem poles were installed at Council Bluff. For over 60 years they stood guard over campfires, skill presentations, special days, passwords, etc. Unfortunately, they could not last forever, and this past summer they were replaced. The old poles are now in storage, and plans are underway to have them mounted inside a building at camp.



The replacement totem poles are real works of art. A photograph does not do them justice - they must be seen in person to really see their majesty.



The new poles were carved by an artist in the Pacific Northwest and shipped to Minikani earlier this summer. They were unveiled at the campfire to celebrate the 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary of YMCA camping.

The new totem poles were an anonymous gift. On the back of each pole is a dedication reading "Given in Recognition of Brian and Mark Siegel's commitment to the Spirit of Minikani." What a wonderful way to preserve one of Minikani's traditions and recognize the efforts of two great staff members.

At the alumni weekend in August, the reaction to the new totem poles varied from "Beautiful" to "Eye Catching" to "I didn't even notice them". I think the last reaction almost sums up the importance of having Totem Poles at Council Bluff. It's like any of our Minikani Traditions: We take them for granted most of the time, but we really appreciate that they are there when we think about them.



## New White Raggers

Eight people accepted the challenge of the White Rag at camp this summer. Their challenge is for a "Life of full time Christian Service to Youth." Our congratulations go out to Casey Cox – Explorer Unit Director, Colin Harari – Explorer Unit Director, Kendall Dowsett – Explorer Unit Director, Molly Knutson – Alumnus, Murph De Vane – Day Camp Director, Joe Rooney – Range Director, Charlie Blumberg – LT Director, and Hank Bagelman.



## Nature Notes

*By Bruce*

There is something new at Mud Lake. Or maybe you call it Chief Hueniker Lake. Although sometimes the lake takes a 'back seat' to the 5 times larger, deeper Amy Belle Lake, Mud Lake is a wonderful nature resource for the camp. You probably already know that, having spent time along its banks looking for frogs and turtles, watching the bird life, or just enjoying the serenity of this aquatic jewel.



Now you can access the lake from its Northern end. Two new boardwalks were built in camp, a gift from the Verne & Terri Holoubek Family Foundation. One goes from behind the Halquist building to the Sleepy Hollow campsite, on the way to Pine Forest. The other, which includes a large 20 foot platform, allows you to easily travel along the North edge of Mud Lake, enjoy the sights and sounds, and appreciate all of its beauty.





## A Note From Brian Siegel

*Retiring Summer Camp  
Program Director*

As I look back upon this past summer, it is tough to designate key moments that exemplify my final experience at Minikani as a staff member. I was so proud of all the staff that we had this summer, and I felt like it was one of the strongest staffing units that I have ever been a part of in my ten years. The first years conducted their cabins like veteran counselors, while the O/LT 3's soaked up and used all the guidance they could find. Seeing these young men and women in action this summer gives me all the confidence that Minikani is in wonderful hands for the next generations.

Beyond the people, this summer saw the re-birth of the expedition program. The Master Explorer program was brought back in order to attract older teens, and giving then a second opportunity to apply to the leadership training programs. This program, under the guidance of Matt Sullivan and Casey Cox, was a huge success. These two, along with the Master Explorer counselors, gave those kids the trip of a lifetime. I can't wait to see how the program grows next summer.

Finally, I would like to reflect briefly about ending my career at Minikani. It was a very difficult process to know that I would no longer be there to create the magic for the campers. It was not so much leaving camp and not being a part of the experience because I know that returning for campfires and alumni events would help fill that void. Yet,

there is something to be said about removing yourself from the process of helping others instill the Minikani spirit into all those kids that step foot onto camp. The joy coming from seeing them connect with their counselor and other kids, laughing until they cry at a campfire, and telling you what cabin they will be a counselor in within the next seven years is indescribable. This is the part of being at camp that I will miss the most. Before I left, I told the staff one simple message: pass it along as you were taught yourself. I hope that this will keep the spirit of the past alive and thriving within today's staff. For all of you alumni that have helped me along the way achieve my dream of working at camp for so long, I thank you.



## Your Newsletter

Do you have a favorite camp memory? (Actually, who doesn't?) Maybe a better question would be, "Do you have a favorite camp memory that you could share with other Alumni?" If you can answer "Yes" to that question, then the Newsletter wants to hear from you. Other questions you may be able to answer "Yes" to are: "Do you know an Alumnus who we can 'Spotlight' in a future edition?" "Do you have questions about camp that we can research?" and "Can you suggest a future topic for the Newsletter?" You get the idea. This is your Newsletter – feel free to make a contribution. Send your email to [BruceRass@wi.rr.com](mailto:BruceRass@wi.rr.com).



## Check Out These Websites

### [www.minikanistafflodge.com](http://www.minikanistafflodge.com)

This is the main site for the Minikani Alumni Community. Once here, you can click to join the official mailing list. You can also keep up-to-date on all the current happenings of the Community.

### [www.minikani.org](http://www.minikani.org)

This is the official web site of YMCA Camp Minikani. You can get information on dates for summer camp, check out Minikani's blog, and enjoy a collection of Alumni Photos.

# SpotLight

## On Alumni

**Neil Willenson** was a camper and LT at Minikani in the 1980's. In 1993 he founded Camp Heartland, a camp for children whose lives had been affected by HIV AIDS, poverty, and other significant life challenges. I had a chance to interview Neil about his experiences at camp and how they have influenced his life.

**1. Any favorite/unfavorite memories of camp?** I have countless fond memories of Camp Minikani. Euell the tortoise at the Nature Lodge is one. The many campfires that featured Steve "Mr. Rogers" Hasbrook and the great bluegrass music of many talented counselors is another. I still think about the unbridled joy of playing Capture the Flag in Pine Forest. As for unpleasant memories – Ethel's hash was not my favorite meal.

**2. What skills did you develop?** Besides a lifelong appreciation for the outdoors and nature, the greatest skill I gained was self confidence. Many adolescents – myself included at the time– do not have an abundance of self confidence. The caring nature of Minikani's staff coupled with the LT program helped provide me with an increased self esteem and valuable leadership skills that had a role in making me who I am today.

**3. Tell us more about Camp Heartland.** Back when many summer camps were unwilling to rent to Camp Heartland due to the fear of those living with HIV/AIDS, the leadership of the YMCA and Camp Minikani opened the camp to us during our early years from 1993-1995. By doing so they demonstrated great compassion, vision and leadership – far ahead of the curve in the HIV/AIDS arena. Words cannot adequately describe the level of my gratitude to the leadership, staff and volunteers of Camp Minikani for the charitable spirit they demonstrated at a challenging time.



**4. What are you doing now?** For the past 18 years I have been the Founder and CEO of One Heartland (formerly called Camp Heartland), a national charity that greatly improves the lives of children, youth and families affected by HIV/AIDS. I recently announced my retirement from One Heartland as CEO, and will instead serve as a volunteer "Founder Ambassador." In mid-October I will begin work as the Vice President of Community Relations of Kapco in Grafton, WI where I will have the opportunity to continue my work in philanthropy and community events.

**5. Has camp had an influence in your success?** Absolutely. People who never attended camp tend to underestimate its value. I call it the "Kumbaya Effect." They think camping is just about hugs, pillow fights and singing silly songs. While some of that is true, camping is also about making a profound year-round and even life-long impact for children. I know camp provided me with the self confidence to succeed as a non-profit executive.

**6. What does camp mean to you?** More than anything else, when I think of Camp Minikani I think of a place of great compassion, acceptance and accomplishment.



## 2nd Annual Holiday Winter Event

### We need your feedback!

This year Julie Hoesly, one of our new board members, will be running our annual Holiday Event, but she needs your help in order to plan an event that is best for you! Please fill out the on-line survey to give us some feedback, we would love to hear what you would like.

Watch your email for more information, including a "Save The Date".

**Thanks for taking less than 5 minutes to fill out this survey. (Please do it now - The survey 'closes' on 10/18/10.)**

<http://www.zoomerang.com/Survey/WEB22B8USARDU4>



## Please Help Us

You can help us to help others *Come Home to Minikani*. We have almost 40 years of Staff Lists that include names, home addresses, school addresses, telephone numbers, and sometimes even birthdays. While it is a great resource, it doesn't go very far in getting the word out to new Alumni members that we are here. And that is where you can help us a lot.

Do you think you can come up with just one person who you know from camp who might like to join our ranks? Maybe someone who you worked with in the Units, or taught a skill with. It might be someone who you kept in contact with after camp, but haven't heard from in years. If every person just connected with one new person, the membership of our community would double. And that would be fantastic. In the future, we hope to have a website that lists every single staff member that worked at camp,

and for those who wish, a link to their present information.

So here's your assignment. Get in touch with at least one person from camp, encourage them to go to our website to register (see page 3), and sit back and relax, knowing that you've helped our membership double. It's just that easy. You can think of it as helping someone else *Come Home to Minikani*. Aren't you glad you did?



## 2010 – 2011 Minikani Alumni Community Board Members

I asked the Board Members to give their contact information, to tell when they were at camp, to tell what they're doing now, and to say what their favorite skill at camp was. Here are the results:

**Julie Wehling Goebel** ([julia.goebel@gmail.com](mailto:julia.goebel@gmail.com)) 1989-1996 (staff 1994-96). I work in tech marketing and love cool gadgets. My favorite skills to learn and teach were anything on the waterfront!

**Perry LaRoque** ([perrylaroque@hotmail.com](mailto:perrylaroque@hotmail.com)) 1994-2001. Associate Professor and Coordinator of the Special Education Department at Johnson State College in VT. Skin Diving and Wilderness Survival Skills.

**Michael Auda** ([michaelauda@gmail.com](mailto:michaelauda@gmail.com)) 1999 – 2003. I currently work in sales for Coca-Cola Enterprises. My favorite skill at camp is Skin Diving .

**Jason Horowitz** ([jasonhorowitz@gmail.com](mailto:jasonhorowitz@gmail.com)). My first year on staff was 1993, and my last year on staff was 2004. I currently work as a child psychologist and live in Madison with my wife and fellow Minikani alum Kerry Burke and our 8 month old daughter Molly. My favorite skill was corral.

**Mike "Skippy" Whitcomb** ([mjwhitcomb@gmail.com](mailto:mjwhitcomb@gmail.com)) 1997-2005 . I am an attorney in the Milwaukee area. My favorite skill was sailing only because "storebox" isn't really a skill.

**Julie (Richards) Hoesly** ([jhoesly@wi.rr.com](mailto:jhoesly@wi.rr.com)) Camper from '68 (first year they let females attend camp for a week) - through LT program. Counselor, then LT director for '78 and '79. Live in Brookfield; three grown kids (2 former campers). Work part-time. Favorite skill was crafts in the Fireside Lodge kitchen making endless enamel pieces.

**Jon Fleming McLaren** ([jon.fleming.mclaren@gmail.com](mailto:jon.fleming.mclaren@gmail.com)) 1980 - 1997, served as Explorer Director, Expeditions Leader, and Director of Top Gun Boating. Married to Julie Nitka McLaren "Crafty Julie" - of Minikani fame. We live just outside of Washington, D.C., with our daughter Aubrey, 9, and son Ian, 3. We enjoy grilling and eating cheese. My favorite skill while at camp was Top Gun Boating.

**Bruce Rasmussen** ([BruceRass@wi.rr.com](mailto:BruceRass@wi.rr.com)) 1970-1991. I am presently a retired biology teacher living the good life. My favorite skill at camp was.....Nature - no surprise.