

READING EAGLE

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With economy down, camping is up, including at facilities serving Berks County

By Erin Negley

As the recession pinches vacation plans for some families, Girl Scout leaders say camp attendance is up as a result.

Overall, camp registration for the Girl Scouts of Eastern Pennsylvania is about 3 percent higher than in 2008, and there's still a month left in the season.

Attendance at Camp Laughing Waters near Gilbertsville is even better. It has increased 10 percent. And at Camp Wood Haven near Pine Grove, Schuylkill County, attendance is up 18 percent.

"In all times, but particularly in tough economic times, Girl Scouting provides a great value," said Ann Meredith, Girl Scouts of Eastern Pennsylvania chief executive officer.

Locally, camps range from \$145 for a three-day gardening theme to \$715 for a two-week scuba camp. Many weeklong camps cost \$285.

Attendance is up because the camps are competitively priced, people trust the Girl Scouts and families are gravitating toward the basics, Meredith said.

At camp, girls can try new things such as white-water rafting, rock climbing and horseback riding. The activities build courage, confidence and character, which are important leadership steps, Meredith said.

"When girls are in a camp setting, it is an opportunity for immersion of all that we do to enable girls to discover themselves, connect with others and find their way of taking action to make the world a better place," she said.

Camp Wood Haven, a 230-acre sleep-over camp near Pine Grove, was started by the Girl Scouts Berks County Council in the 1950s, camp director Michele M. Bement said. Usually, about half of the campers are from Berks County.



"At Camp Wood Haven, a Girl Scout overnight camp near Pine Grove, Schuylkill County, climbing the wall is a good thing. Scaling, left, is Jessie Benner, 12, of Concordville, Delaware County.

In the week or two the girls spend at the camp, Bement wants them to try something new and leave feeling good about themselves.

Last week, campers were doing things such as looking for crayfish, boating on Sweet Arrow Lake, horseback riding and exploring cooking, forensics and art.

Camper Camille J. Chadwick, 14, of Wyomissing was looking forward to a Wood Haven trip to Ohiopyle State Park, where she could hike, rock climb and go white-water rafting.

Danielle A. Miller, 13, of Wayne, Delaware County said she likes meeting new people.

"It changes you," said Megan M. Donovan, 14, of Marple Township, Delaware County. "You become more responsible."



Haylee J. Sayer of Exeter Township, 12, right, rides Class during horseback activities at Camp Wood Haven, a Girl Scout facility near Pine Grove, Schuylkill County.

While camps in 20 states have sent kids home early or canceled sessions because of swine flu fears, Camp Wood Haven and the other eastern district Girl Scout camps haven't had major problems, Meredith said.

In June, a girl suspected of having swine flu was sent home early from Camp Mountain House near Allentown, she said.

Girls arriving at camp have their temperature taken, a usual procedure, and those with high temperatures are sent home.

There's also antibacterial soap throughout the camps and girls are encouraged to wash hands frequently.

Scouting visits Berks girls who lack means, opportunity to attend camp

Some girls don't have the means or the opportunity to go to summer camp, so the Girl Scouts bring the camp to them.

The Girl Scouts of Eastern Pennsylvania's Berks County office visits child-care centers and summer

schools and youth programs weekly to talk about healthy living.

This summer, the office is coordinating visits to 16 sites in Reading, and four more throughout Berks County.

"Our hope for this is to make the girls active and healthy and have healthy relationships," said Cathy K. Ganter, membership manager for the Girl Scouts of Eastern Pennsylvania Berks County office.

Over eight weeks, Girl Scout employees visit the sites once a week for about an hour.

Besides offering activities such as music and arts and crafts, organizers talk about healthy snacks, the importance of fitness and hygiene, and about good relationships.

The program is free for the children and the participating sites. It is funded by United Way of Berks County.

The Girl Scouts have run the summer program for at least 10 years, Ganter said. The organization targets girls in underserved communities.

Information is available at 888-664-9770.

Go camping

The Girl Scouts of Eastern Pennsylvania operates six residential camps and four day camps in eastern Pennsylvania.

The camps are open to all girls 5 to 17 years old, even if they are not registered Girl Scouts. Some camps have other age restrictions.

Partial and full scholarships are offered.

Camps are continuing through mid-August.

The last week is Aug. 9 at local camps, Camp Laughing Waters near Gilbertsville and Camp Wood Haven near Pine Grove.

For more information, go to www.gsep.org.

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