

NBB Speech, March 28, 2022

Good evening everyone and thanks so much for coming out to what will now be our third virtual annual meeting in a row.

Wow times have certainly changed in our lives with the pandemic and the war in Ukraine, but in many respects one thing that remains constant is the very strong continuity that Camp Northland offers our community from the incredible past that our predecessors have given us over the past 100 years– we also have a very strong present situation, and in fact a very exciting future – please indulge me as I take a few minutes to share some perspectives on our past, our present, and our future.

Like a lot of you, I *grew up* in many respects at Camp Northland. It was at camp where I developed a sense of self identity, where I learned how to work as a team, where I explored the beauty of nature, where I gained a strong foundation of Jewish values, and I guess where I started to develop leadership skills.

Like all of you I'm sure, I have many fond memories of my youth at Camp Northland, many hilarious ones, some quite personal ones, and many friends made along the way. All of these shaped who I became as an adult and who I am today.

My experience at camp was probably not that different than many of you, and now that I've been on the Board a few years, I realize that our mandate to give our kids and staff this camp experience that we encountered, is more important than ever. Our current vision "To give every child an amazing Jewish camp experience" feels like it has been in tact for over 100 years !

We all owe a huge gratitude to the many camp leaders that built Northland up over the years. I think of John Bernstein, Ellen Nash, and Steve Polevoy who had important impacts on me, but I also want to recognize more recent leaders who in many respects saved the camp during our challenging years. Neil Zworth and Jay Rudolph stand out for me for their huge dedication and effort, but many of you deserve huge credit.

And of course we need to recognize our current professional staff led by Simon, our fantastic Executive Director, but also including Denise and Rob, who have devoted their entire careers to Camp Northland, and more recently Adam and Marissa – these full time professionals give us their heart and soul every day and all year, and for that we are all so grateful. Thank you so much Simon, Denise, Rob, Adam, and Marissa.

Our current strength is also due to recent leaders such as Greg Evans, who has been an "all star board member" due to his energy, commitment, and willingness to offer an alternative opinion, and of course Stacey Cohen to whom we owe a huge gratitude for his amazing leadership as our President during these last two years, arguably two of the toughest for any president in our history

I believe that as a result of these leaders and many of you, camp is now at a cross roads, where we have a great foundation to build upon. Our tough times are behind us and we have a very solid footing on Moose Lake and here amongst all of you. Heading into this summer, we have a full camp with a waiting list, a solid reputation in our communities, a healthy financial situation, but as our recent SWOT analysis showed, some real challenges that require focus.

Going forward we have a new strategy that many of you contributed to, and I'm very excited about the seven areas we've decided to focus on. It's very intentional that the word *Grow* is the first word of the first strategy. We're not necessarily talking about Growth in number of campers, but growth in the quality of our camp in terms of programming, culture, staff experience, professional capacity, and of course infrastructure such as buildings, health care, and food and catering.

Though I have to say Simon, I still don't understand why some people complain about the food at camp. When I was a kid, I thought it was amazing !! I mean every single meal. It wasn't until I was about 23 that I realized that the reason I loved camp food so much was that my own mom's cooking was so bland !!! We always had lots of food on the table don't get me wrong, it just wasn't as tasty as camp food every summer. Funny isn't it how camp gives you interesting perspectives on life. By the way my mom had many other amazing qualities. Just saying.

I need to add that other areas of camp give me very fond memories. The Health Centre in particular, where my late wife Andrea and my brother Jim each spent several summer weeks over 20 years as the camp doctor, and where I had the pleasure of witnessing the incredible passion and commitment from our amazing nurses such as Catherine Mayers and Dianne (Dragon Lady as many of you would remember her). And I'm very proud that our current Health Centre is named after my dear sister Judi Kauffman, who was a nurse herself and embodied so many of the values our camp stands for.

We as a Board play a pivotal role in this new Strategic Growth Plan. I know that Simon and his team will figure out the right pace and priority for the initiatives behind each of our seven strategies. And I have 100% confidence that Simon will guide us in the right implementation plan and tell us where he needs our assistance

One item we need to figure out is our renewed vision. I really like our current vision "To give every child an amazing Jewish camp experience", but I also love some of the ideas that have recently been put forward, not least of which are two suggestions from our amazing alumni Darren Rabie. One of his ideas is "Building the next Generation of Jewish Leaders" and another is "getting Jewish youth ready for life".

We need lots of input like this and in many other ways from our alumni and board members. I'm so pleased with the growing diversity of the Board in terms of gender and age and know we'll have some amazing discussions and action-oriented initiatives. I'm particularly looking forward to working with our new Board members Esther, Jodi, and Jen.

Ideas and questions are not enough however. We need to roll up our sleeves and drive action, and I challenge you all to think about the specific contribution you want to leave behind - actually your legacy - after your Board term or participation on various committees is completed. What do you want to accomplish for Camp is a great question for all of us to reflect on and answer.

As your next president, I promise to put a lot of energy into this role, but will work with a broad team to drive our ongoing success. Your new executive includes fantastic leaders such as Garry Wise and Amy Lasky and I can't wait to see their next set of contributions to our camp.

If I serve you well, my contributions will be;

- an active coach to Simon and his team as they run Camp Northland and the Jewish Camp Council of Toronto, and consider and execute initiatives
- a coordinator of efforts that we as the board contribute to and drive
- a facilitator of refined partnerships with key stakeholder such as Federation
- Improved governance and visibility to key financial and operational metrics
- And if you permit me, a few of my own personal interest ideas such as program innovation in areas such as the Environment, Astronomy, perhaps a year-round cabin or two, and maybe even some aspect of new societal priorities such as Indigenous reconciliation

As our former Board member Laura Helen coined the phrase, this is "Our Camp Our Future", and I invite you to help drive the next few years of growth. It will be hard work I know, but tons of fun and most rewarding, and I'm looking forward to this journey with all of you to develop the next generation of Jewish leaders through their experience at Camp Northland.

"To give every child an amazing Jewish camp experience" – what a great vision to continue to strive for as we grow our capabilities and set up success for the next 100 years !

Rick Carson, Toronto, March 28, 2020

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