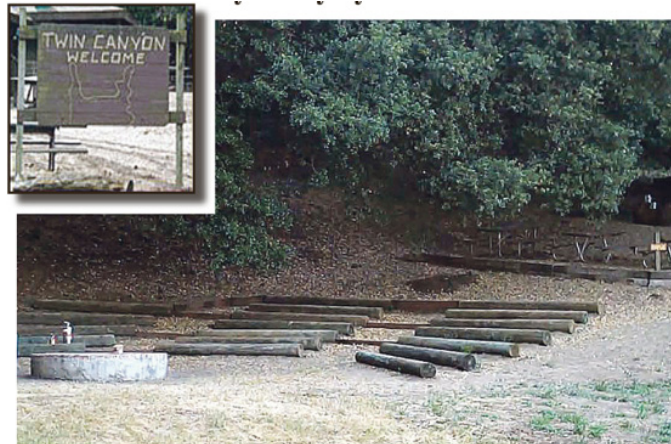


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Options Weighed for Future of Lafayette Girl Scout Camp

By Cathy Tyson



Twin Canyon Camp Photos provided

from Chico to Santa Cruz.

GSNorCal spends approximately \$1.7 million per year, net of rental income, operating the properties spread across the region. They also estimate \$454,000 per year should be spent or reserved for capital repairs to meet health and safety requirements. Cookie sales and donations fund these expenses. The Board and Finance Committee concluded that just to keep up with inflation and expenses they need to reduce by 25 percent what they spend on these properties and use the properties to build an emergency reserve. It may be possible to raise money via selling conservation easements on some of the properties that could help jump-start a reserve account.

Preliminary recommendations included in an August 2011 report separate the camp properties that best meet GSNorCal's outdoor program goals. Four Tier One camps demonstrated opportunities to increase revenue and reduce expenses. Three camp properties fell into Tier Two - that management feels can realistically move to break even operations. Unfortunately Lafayette's own Twin Canyon camp was questionable - falling into Tier Three.

"I have two meetings scheduled with volunteers during January to work on a plan to get Twin Canyon's operations closer to break even," said Marina Park, CEO of Girl Scouts of Northern California. "I am optimistic we will be able to accomplish that goal. The volunteer-run day camp at Twin Canyon is looking into increasing the fees it charges to help cover more of the costs of operating the camp property, and other volunteers have expressed interest in being part of a fundraising campaign to establish a reserve fund that will generate income to help pay for operations and repairs on the property. We are taking some time to explore these possibilities with interested volunteers and community members."

Since 1954, Twin Canyon has been hosting scores of happy campers for outdoor retreats, troop camping and training courses. The sprawling original 65-acre site off of Springhill Road was purchased outright through a special fund drive, cookie sales and calendar sales; clearly land was cheaper back in those days. Fast forward to 1978 when a 35-acre portion of Twin Canyon was deemed too hilly for camping use was sold at \$1,000 per acre to the East Bay Regional Park District. As the city has grown up around it, Twin Canyon has remained a favorite destination for Girl Scouts past and present. Local supporters are making a concerted effort to save the camp.

Looking forward, the Board and Finance Committee have concluded that they could reduce the property subsidy through a combination of revenue growth, expense reductions and donations and can raise the reserve funds in several ways, including property sales. CEO Park has been authorized to continue working on conservation easements of two properties in the Santa Cruz mountains.

There will be a Town Hall meeting to discuss options for Twin Canyon, for interested parties, on January 18 from 6:30 - 8:30 p.m. at Grace Presbyterian Church, 2100 Tice Valley Boulevard in Walnut Creek.

Even non-profit organizations have to take a hard look at revenues and expenses to keep their doors open. For the Girl Scouts of Northern California (GSNorCal) donations are down, expenses are up and cookie sales don't quite make ends meet.

Faced with this challenging financial situation, the GSNorCal Board and Property Task Group have been evaluating their twenty-nine properties looking to maximize efficiency and reduce losses. "GSNorCal is fortunate to have magnificent properties, but we cannot afford to operate and maintain all of these properties, unless we make significant cuts in other service areas," stated a member update from September of this year. The correspondence went on to explain that as part of its strategic plan the organization has a goal of establishing a six month reserve of at least \$4.7 million to satisfy the minimum Girl Scout requirement, and to end deficit spending.

The group analyzed the six offices, two service centers, eight program centers that serve as meeting space, four outdoor centers that include Lafayette's Twin Canyon, and nine camps for weekend and summer camping spread

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