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## Girl Scout Camp Fighting for Survival

By Cathy Tyson



Woodchuck den Photo Cathy Tyson

Finding Lafayette Girl Scout camp Twin Canyon on the third tier of a list of camps that are in jeopardy of closing due to debt and non self-sustainability, there was an outpouring of support and a letter writing campaign for the beloved camp that generations of girl scouts have enjoyed, that has saved it, at least for now, from the budget ax. Like many non-profit organizations, donations are down and expenses are up and aging facilities are feeling the pinch. Several women stepped up to spearhead an effort to save the camp in March of 2012. Calling themselves the Twin Canyon Working Group, they collaborated with Girl Scouts of Northern California staff and summertime user Diablo Day Camp to keep campfires burning for years to come.

Their goal is making the bucolic 65-acre Twin Canyon facility, which first opened in 1954, located at the end of Springhill Road sustainable for the long term, a goal that is going to take more than cookie sales. Over 2,500 campers have access to the facility and its trails each year, while the setting is spectacular and convenient, the vintage buildings need infrastructure upgrades, and the camp is roughly \$70,000 in debt.

Like the Girl Scout program itself which strives to bring girls to responsible womanhood, learning responsibility and leadership skills, these women got down to business and developed a detailed 5-year master plan that focused on major projects and a return to sustainability.

"The Break-Even Plan includes a combination of revenue growth and expense reductions that will reduce current losses by 50 percent no later than the FY 2014 budget and achieve full break-even operations no later than the FY 2017 budget," said Sandra Patterson of the working group. They set specific, attainable monetary goals to meet and have a plan in place to evaluate their situation.

"If we do not meet the goals set, then yes, Girl Scouts will have to decide if they want to spend the extra money to keep it open. And that could include closing the camp," said Patterson.

Needs at the camp include a new roof on the pool house and commercial toilets for the "Junior Biffy" an acronym for "bathrooms in forest for you," pointed out site manager Jock Eggers. "Woodchuck" is a funky, yet charming building that was put together by volunteers in the 1960s using actual telephone poles and redwood siding; now the roof is clearly moldy and sagging. This relic that has seen its share of campers over the years may be on the list to be mothballed.

Only three miles from civilization, the camp's location in the oak studded rolling hills above Lafayette makes it convenient, and coupled with fully outfitted camping areas, an ideal spot for scores of Girl Scout troops in the East Bay. Each camping area has dedicated picnic tables and sturdy barbecue areas, perfect for marshmallow roasting, and even running water nearby along with fire extinguishers, a grand outdoor amphitheater, and restroom facilities with flushable, although dated, toilets that take the edge off of roughing it. Easy hiking trails are part of the camp and for those looking for more of a workout, Briones Open Space is directly adjacent allowing dedicated hikers to make it all the way to Martinez.

Volunteers are mindful of funds people donate, trying to balance strategic improvements, yet still keeps costs reasonable for Girl Scout campers and outside groups who rent the facility, said Karyn Kleimann, the team coordinator for the group. Now that they have a plan in place, they need to implement it - enter their upcoming October Hike-a-thon. For more information contact the hike coordinator at [TwinCanyonGSCampHikeathon2013@gmail.com](mailto:TwinCanyonGSCampHikeathon2013@gmail.com).

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