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Scout Summer Camp Out of the Woods

By Cathy Tyson



Four Girl Scouts, along with a raccoon, pose in front of the welcome sign at Girl Scout Camp Twin Canyon in Lafayette. Photo provided

that staying the course, continuing to own and operate all 29 GSNorCal properties is not sustainable, according to CEO Marina Park, so they are exploring their options. A property task force from the Northern California Division is focusing on camps that have the lowest attendance and are the most expensive to operate. Twin Canyon has a robust attendance, and now with the help of generous donations addressing infrastructure needs as well as key green updates, it looks like the camp is out of the woods, at least for the time being.

Responding to concerns to keep the camp open, the Twin Canyon Work Group formed to come up with a break-even plan to address the pressing financial situation.

Once the plan was approved, the Twin Canyon Site Committee was formed to implement that plan. Under the direction of site committee co-chairs Sandra Patterson and Denise Greenspan, along with a number of other volunteers, they got busy generating more revenue by expanding use at the camp during non-summer months and campaigning to increase grants, fundraising, donations and leveraging local generosity.

Their goal is to be sustainable and work toward breaking even in 2017; their plan was to raise a relatively modest \$5,000 per year for three years and \$10,000 per year in 2017. It's fair to say they've been successful. In fiscal year 2013, they raised over \$43,000 from a number of sources, including donations from the Tent and Trails fund, a Hike-a-thon, cookie sales, the Spectacular Raffle, a generous grant from the Lafayette Community Foundation, Lafayette Juniors and a \$10,000 grant for tree work from Grosvenor.

Savvy organizers recently garnered help from the Kiwanis Club of Moraga to purchase a new stove and refrigerator. Clayton Valley Sunrise Rotary and the Kiwanis Club of Martinez purchased nine low-flow toilets with donated labor from Nuance Construction that will save roughly 50,000 gallons of water per year. In addition, Job Corps students were able to practice their newfound skills by removing old inefficient lighting fixtures and installing energy efficient long-lasting LED lights as

It was only a handful of years ago that Lafayette's hidden gem that has served generations of campers, Girl Scout Camp Twin Canyon, was in dire financial straits. Operating at a deficit, faced with aging infrastructure and rising costs, the 35-acre camp near Briones Regional Park, purchased with Girl Scout cookie sale revenue back in 1954, was designated a Tier 3 camp, in danger of being mothballed or sold.

Twin Canyon, located at the end of Springhill Road in Lafayette, was one of a number of Girl Scout camps that faced possible closure, but thanks to the efforts of dedicated volunteers, the camp is again open for business. For the foreseeable future it will continue to provide a summer time experience many Lamorinda girls know and love.

Girl Scouts of Northern California are faced with some hard choices. At their annual board meeting, a large majority of members expressed the view

well as painting at the camp, trail maintenance, installing retaining walls and rebuilding a barbecue pit. They also had a tree replacement GoFundMe effort that raised over \$16,000 created by Stephanie Chew to help plant shade trees and support reforestation.

The facility was "in dire need of refreshing" said Patterson. "Now it looks spectacular."

Diablo Day Camp, part of the Girls Scouts of Northern California community for over 50 years, leases the facility during the summer months. They have supported the camp improvements financially, and free Job Corps labor was critical to getting the job done. These developments are part of the Site Committee's emphasis on going green, and updating the aging facilities in order to be more attractive to outside group rentals.

Greenspan explained what it's like to "walk the line" with other camp volunteer staff during the Spectacular Raffle, providing information on the camp, where the funds raised will be spent and selling \$20 raffle tickets to the parents waiting in line to pick up their kids.

"Twin Canyon is in great shape right now," said GSNorCal CEO Park. "Hats off to the community, they've done a really good job understanding the needs of Twin Canyon and the reality of what it takes to keep the gates open - they've been incredibly supportive." She also praised all the hard work of the Site Committee for bringing the camp closer to break even and successfully in obtaining grants and donations.

Hard choices are slated to be made at the November 2017 Girl Scout Annual Meeting as the board looks at the overall portfolio of properties; focusing on camps with the least amount of use which are the most expensive to operate. The sale of one or more of these properties would be used to continue to support other more robust camps.

Attendance at the camp has increased to 22,900 camper days per year and the facility is nearing break even, but is still grappling with aging infrastructure. For more information on Camp Twin Canyon and to view a YouTube video go to www.twincanyon.org.

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