

Owasippe Boy Scout camp getting spruced up with infusion of cash and love

BLUE LAKE TOWNSHIP, MI -- Owasippe Scout Reservation is getting lots of love, from trail builders, former staff members and its owner, the Chicago Council of Boy Scouts.

The sprawling Boy Scouts camping spot has been getting spruced up for its summer camping season, which begins in late June, although the harsh and long winter has hampered some efforts.

The Chicago Council is making good on **its commitment to invest \$1 million into the camp's aging facilities** that had been neglected as the council spent years planning to sell the property in northern Muskegon County.

In addition, **the Owasippe Staff Association is working on a major renovation of an endangered, historic "Guest Lodge"** as well as other projects on the property. And work continues on trails of which mountain bikers have improved about 13 miles for riding.

According to Steve Adams, the Chicago Council's director of support services, some of the \$1 million "Making Owasippe Better" campaign improvements include:

- The purchase of 333 new mattresses for all cabins, including the Reneker Family Camp cabins, the lake cabins on Lake Wolverine and the staff cabins.
- The purchase of new refrigerators and stoves for cabins that needed them.
- Major repairs to the Camp Blackhawk dining hall.
- New hot water heaters at Camp Wolverine so that all sites now have hot water.
- Major renovations to the 100-year-old museum building, which is a former township hall.
- The purchase of new archery equipment.
- The purchase of a stump grinder and chipper to help create chips for hiking trails and other areas where dust needs to be controlled.
- The hiring of a cleaning service to thoroughly clean all buildings, something that Adams said "we've never done before."
- Replacement of the pool shower house at Camp Wolverine.

The council is using volunteer work to help with the improvements, and a work weekend is scheduled for June 6-8.

"The brutal weather really messed up our construction schedule," Adams said. "Our plans for doing everything prior to camp has had to change."

The six-week camping season begins June 22, and work will resume after the camping season is over, Adams said.

At that time, several dying trees will be removed and one campsite each at Camp Wolverine and Camp Blackhawk will be reconfigured to be more handicap accessible. The high ropes course also will be upgraded in the future -- something that had always been planned, Adams said.

"It's never happened, but we're going to make it happen," he said.

In addition, program equipment will be inspected for replacement, and new programming will be added, he said.

The Owasippe Staff Association has been working on its own improvements at the camp, including renovating a historic hunting lodge on the property, known as the Guest Lodge. The lodge was built in 1940 as part of the former Lake Wolverine Club, but had come into such disrepair that the Council announced it would have to be demolished.

That's when the OSA stepped in with a plan to save the old log structure where staff members had stayed while preparing Owasippe for summer camp and after camp sessions were over to close things up.

The OSA has either completed or expects to complete a new screen porch, a new steel roof, installation of new windows and new doors, a new septic system, plumbing and electrical updates, two new bathrooms and a refurbished kitchen. Work so far has cost \$38,000, and the group has another \$18,200 but is still trying to raise more money to complete renovations.

When it's finished the Guest Lodge should be able to sleep between 24 and 30 and will be used as a Scout outpost for the science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) programs. In the fall it will be retrofitted to become a winter dormitory complex for rent.

Other improvements at Owasippe that the staff association is undertaking include a new shot gun shelter at Camp Wolverine, repairs to the cook's cabin and renovations of the Crown Chapel in addition to the usual odd jobs it undertakes prior to each camping season.

"It's been exciting times," Adams said. "We're excited about the change, the investment in new things and really sprucing things up."

The council board earlier this year committed to invest \$1 million in improvements to the 4,800-acre property in Blue Lake Township.

The future of Owasippe had been in question several years ago when the council had a \$19 million offer from a Holland-area businessman for the property. But plans to sell the 4,800-acre property were derailed after the township board refused to adjust the zoning and a protracted legal battle began in 2006.

Since then a change in leadership in Chicago has ignited a new commitment to the 102-year-old camp.

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The Owasippe Staff Association works to renovate the historic "Guest Lodge" at the Boy Scouts reservation.
Courtesy photo

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