



# NEWSLETTER

# 2022

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Thanks To: Alex Hushek, Eli Fyksen, Eric Johnson and Mary Diers Kokan

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With the start of a new year it seems appropriate to review what the MAC is all about. Three words say it all: Minikani Alumni Community.

**Minikani** – “Camp we love so well”, and a place we know so well. But it’s much more than just a ‘place’. We lived there, ate there, played there, learned there, and made lasting friends there. We remember the first time we were there, and maybe the last. It’s a place we hold dear to our hearts.

**Alumni** – One of the dictionary definitions describes alumni as former members of a group. For a time you and I belonged to Minikani. We were Minikani. And then we left Minikani.

**Community** –It’s easy to share a feeling of fellowship with others as a result of our common attitudes, interests, and goals. We work together by sharing our strengths, and come together both socially and physically in the name of Minikani.

In this edition of the Newsletter you’ll see how the pieces of the MAC work together, including: what’s going on at camp today, invitations to join other alumni, why camp is so important, stories about camp people you may not even know, but with whom you share so much, and ideas on how you can be a better member and make the MAC even stronger. Truth be told, *you* are the MAC.



## Winter Camp 2021 by Alex Hushek

### Here was the Promise:

Come to Minikani and enjoy skiing, snowboarding, or tubing at Sunburst Ski Hill, an opening campfire, plenty of fun clubs and activities, enough hot cocoa to fill up Mud Lake AND Amy Belle, and (one of) our biggest events of the year - The New Year's Eve Eve Party! The campers get a perfect winter vacation at their second home while the parents enjoy a little quieter house around the holidays. It's win/win for everyone!

### This is What Happened:

The weather was chilly and the days cloudy, but our hearts were warm and smiles were bright as we reconnected with our summer home. It was a classic week filled with kids wearing a t-shirt insisting they weren't cold, eating snow until their cheeks were numb and rosy, and snowballs flying in every direction.

Amongst the craziness, new friendships blossomed, new passions explored, and as always, stories were made. Minikani campers took over the Sunburst slopes, and the trails were quickly filled with kids laughing and carving through the snow (with maybe one or two kids scooting down the side). Then came the biggest global event of the holiday season, the New Year's Eve Eve party! The Winter Olympics showcased inspiring talents in the frosty fields of sledding, snowball throwing, and much more!

Thanks to everyone that came to Minikani's Winter Camp and made it the most memorable yet!



## Minikani Songbook

Hopefully you have had a chance to go to the MAC website and download your free .pdf copy of the Minikani Song Book.

As you read the words to the songs, the tune (if they have one...) will 'pop' into your head. With any luck you will be taken back to your good 'ole Minikani days. You'll find Cheers, Action Songs, Spiritual and Gospel Songs, Call and Repeat Songs, as well as Traditional Songs.



Click on any song in the Table of Contents and you'll go right to that song's page. The last page has an alphabetical listing of all 99 songs.

Go to our website anytime to download your Songbook.  
(<http://minikanistafflodge.com/>)

## Minikani Survey

Hey All,

In an effort to be more intentional, transparent, and communicate in a way that works for our stakeholders we have developed the following short survey. I would love it if you would take the survey and/or send it on to those who might want to provide feedback.

Thanks in advance! Eli Fyksen

<https://ymcaofmetropolitanmilwaukee.formstack.com/.../min...>

# Memorial Day Family Camp

by Eric Johnson

When I left Camp Minikani at the end of the summer in 1991 I didn't realize it was going to be my last summer at camp. College costs and other responsibilities took precedent - part of growing-up, as we all know. The years pass and we may fondly look back and think, "...I wish I had spent just one more summer at Minikani".

Now fast-forward 14 years to 2005. My sister and I contacted camp and asked if there was still Memorial Day Family Camp at Minikani. To no real surprise - there was. I had worked as a staff member that holiday weekend a couple times and attended with my parents from about 1976 to 1986. If you don't exactly know what Family Camp is, please read on...



Bobby (left) celebrating his birthday at Family Camp with Bennett

We registered and came to Family Camp that year (2005) with my one-year-old son, my wife Tara, my sister and her young family, and of course my Mom and Dad – all squeezing into the old bunks and space of Cabin 13 in the Pioneer Unit. It was awesome to be greeted with that 'old cabin fragrance' and

to find vesper-candle burn marks on the same well-worn tables.

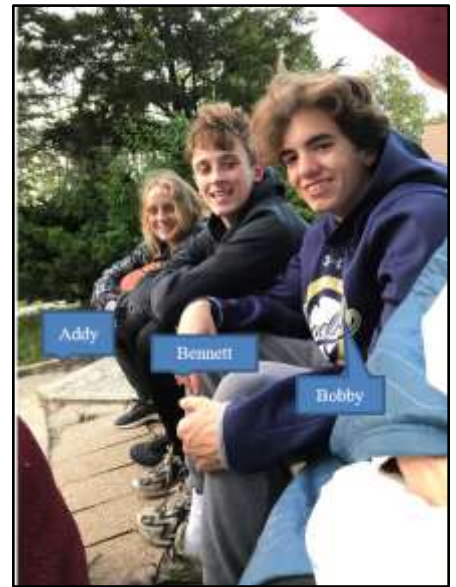
Minikani Family Camp provides an opportunity for families – no matter the size - to stomp around Minikani's 150+ acres to your heart's content, to eat "great" meals in the Dining Hall, to play all-Camp kickball, BINGO, horseback ride, canoe, climb the climbing wall, sail, sing songs, enjoy campfires, skits, and meet the new camp staff who host all these family friendly events. To be honest, sometimes there's just too much to choose from.



For us, each year at Family Camp was special – whether it was rainy, or 95 degrees, or sunny and mild. Part of the fun was meeting other families who also found Camp Minikani to be a great place to enjoy the three day weekend. Our families have attended every year since 2005 and each time it's been like a small 'reunion' seeing so many familiar faces. (OK not 2020 - COVID).

I am a bit surprised that few Minikani Alumni take advantage of Family Camp. I speculate that you just may not know enough about it! I encourage you to check it out. For me (and now my family) it is a bit like 'coming home' and sharing those great camp experiences and memories.

My son Bobby, niece Addy, and nephew Bennett have grown up at Family Camp and we all look forward to our annual Camp Reunion and summer kick-off. Bobby



will be off to college this fall with 18 years at Family Camp under his belt. He always remarks that it is a great time to just bum around and laugh! My parents (who will soon be 80 years old) would not miss the great family opportunity and still look forward to sleeping in the familiar bunks of Cabin 13.



Registration is now open!  
Make plans for this year's Memorial Day Weekend Family Camp May 27-30, 2022.

Click [HERE](#) or call Minikani at 262.251.9080

# Setting Intentions



Happy 2022 to everyone. If you're like me, you always like a 'new' anything - a new day, a new project, a new semester, a new year. One of the things I really liked about working at Minikani was all the new opportunities – a new password, a new summer, a new session, a new group of campers, etc. Did last week's kids leave you frustrated? Don't worry, there's a fresh group coming on Sunday.

How are you coming with your 2022 Resolutions? While a whole new year gives us an opportunity to look at ways we can improve ourselves, some experts suggest approaching these changes in a less-pressured way. Some people make vague resolutions like, 'I'm going to be happier,' or 'I want to be healthier,' but they're almost impossible to put into practice.

Why set yourself up for failure? Instead, try shifting your mind-set from 'resolutions' to 'setting intentions', which offers a more enjoyable approach to creating lasting change regardless of the time of year. 'Intentions' give us a chance to make changes in ourselves without all the pressure.

Here are some online tips for successful Intention-Setting:

**Make it measurable:** Try saying 'I'm going to do one fun thing every week,' or 'I'm going to go to the

gym four days a week for 25 minutes at a time'.

**Break it down:** You don't have to shoot for the whole year. When we set short-term objectives (week, month) they're much more doable. You can start to see progress, which helps to keep you motivated.

**Make it actionable:** Try to figure out one action you can do today to become a step closer to your goal. Unfortunately, you can't just 'think' yourself into reaching your goal. You'll have to take some action.

**Track it:** People are more likely to stick to their goals when they keep track of them. There are lots of phone apps available for quickly jotting things down. Just the act of recording your progress helps raise your awareness and motivation. Again, actions speak louder than words.

**Be kind to yourself:** Any meaningful change takes time and effort. Don't let the small things detour you. You can do this. As they say in the Corral, just "get back on that horse" and give it another try.

# MAC Intentions

Now that you know all about replacing 'Resolutions' with 'Intentions', let's see if you can put the ideas to use and become a better Minikani Alumnus. You may find the following ideas helpful. You can make them part of your New Year's "Intentions" right now and become a better members of the MAC at the same time.

◆ Encourage more of your camp friends to become members. It's simple to do - Ask them, "Are you a

member?" Everyone who has ever worked at Minikani is welcome. It's free and lasts a lifetime. It's easy to do online, costs nothing, and keeps everyone up to date with what's happening at Minikani and with other alumni. Here's the link to join the MAC that you can share:

<http://minikanistafflodge.com/join/>

◆ Bookmark our website on your computer. It's a great resource for all alumni. Tabs include "Join", "Events", "Donations" "Photos" and "Contact Us". On the sidebar you can access "MAC Camp Store", "Staff Lists", "Newsletter" and links to both Twitter and Facebook.

<http://minikanistafflodge.com/>

◆ Share your story with the Newsletter. Personal stories make the best copy. Tell what being a counselor means to you today. Have a funny story? Something heartwarming? Any advice for other alumni? An idea for a future article? Everyone's invited to be a contributor. Really. The Newsletter is published 4 times a year. MAC's email address is easy to remember: [minikanistafflodge@gmail.com](mailto:minikanistafflodge@gmail.com).

◆ How about adopting a counselor or a cabin this summer? Write them letters of encouragement. Send a box filled with craft supplies, reading books (age appropriate), skit costumes from a thrift store, or a dozen bandannas. Maybe clean out your old game closet of games you don't play anymore. Anything sporty. Just think about what you would have loved to have when you were a counselor. (Sorry, no candy or fireworks.) Call camp to make arrangements: (262) 251-9080.



# SpotLight

On Alumni

## Mary Diers Kokan

### ◆ What is your history at Camp?

I was a counselor in 1975 and Leadership Training Co-Director from 1976-77. As a counselor I taught archery for half of the summer and then horsemanship at the corral for the second half.

### ◆ You grew up living on Amy Belle Lake. What was it like to hear and see all of camp's summer activities from that perspective?

Camp Minikani was always part of the neighborhood and community where I lived. The bugles, cheering, singing and lakefront swimming, boating, canoeing and sailing and the laughter and shouting that accompanied this were all normal parts of our daily summer life.

Occasionally, we witnessed special events on the lake that were exciting to see. The most memorable one was when a fiery letter M appeared on a raft in the lake, and the Spirit of Minikani spoke to those gathered at the lakefront. We also looked forward to the July 4 fireworks over the Minikani lakefront preceded by a performance of synchronized canoes with torches.

When I was in grade school, we were one of maybe only 3 families who lived on the lake year round. So, we got to know Camp Director Bob Harlan's family of 5 kids. Once they brought us treats for



Halloween, since trick or treating was not a tradition in our home. We also carpooled to Germantown band practices and events with other camp director's families.

As a kid I wished that I could be a part of camp, but was reminded by my parents, that "living on Amy Belle, we have the good fortune of having what they have at camp all the time".

### ◆ When you started as a counselor, was it difficult for you to 'fit in' with the staff, since most of them had been campers and came from the suburbs?

Actually, all of my siblings had connections with camp prior to my role as a counselor. My oldest sister Patty worked in the office one summer. My sister Sue was a counselor for the 2 week girl's session when that started. My brother Tim did yard work for a neighbor of camp director Don Nordahl's family and brought home our family dog, Sparky, who was one of the Nordahl's dog, Pup's puppies. And my sister Joan worked as a counselor in 1974-75. Also, throughout high school, I babysat for the Nordahl and LaRoque kids.

Being familiar with camp through these experiences helped me to transition to being a part of the camp community. However, I am kind of an introvert, and it was difficult for me to find my place among such a tight staff. I felt at home with the range staff - and I was confident since I actually had some experience with archery in college. It was tougher planning cabin activities because getting time slots for bringing my cabin to the lakefront and the crafts lodge was a challenge. From my perspective, it seemed like the staff who grew up at camp with the staff in those areas had better access.

*Continued next page*



**Leadership II group 1977. Mary is 4th from the right.**

## Grace Weber Update

*(Editor’s note: Grace was the alumni ‘Spotlight’ in the MAC Newsletter 10 years ago.)*

**Piet Levy**, Milwaukee Journal Sentinel Music Writer since 2012, recently wrote an article titled “25 best Milwaukee albums and songs of 2021”. He then created a list of the very best **Top 10 Songs of 2021**, listed in order. At the very top of the list was “**A Beautiful Space**” by Grace Weber. Here’s what he had to say about her and her album:



“It took 12 years, but the Chicago based Weber finally reached the full potential she first displayed as a budding singer on “The Oprah Winfrey Show” in 2009. Long bolstered by her church groomed voice and some splendid songs, Weber finally found the perfect partnership in the Social Experiment, Chance The Rapper’s Grammy-winning creative team, who complement her sublime and soaring vocals with radiant, other worldly production. This wasn’t just the best album of 2021 from a Milwaukee-born artist. This was the best R&B album of the year, period.”

We’ll forgive Mr. Levy for not including Grace’s many hours spent around a Minikani campfire.

Congratulations, Grace.



teaching career. I eventually taught the assertiveness vs aggressiveness concepts, and I-statements vs. You-statements communication skills that we learned during that first staff training with Lloyd, in my Relationships courses and School-to-Work Programs while teaching at Brookfield East, Central, and South Milwaukee High School.

◆ **How would you compare the job of being a camp counselor with being a teacher?**

Teaching and camp counseling are very similar. Both require focusing on the children in your trust and persistence in finding the resources needed to make the magic happen. I came to realize that people, whether big or little, are our most important resource. As a teacher / counselor it was my job to help my campers / students find and develop their gifts. Reaching out to the people I worked with made both jobs easier.

◆ **Is there a song that makes you think of camp?**

The UW Fight Song every time. (*Minikani, Minikani, Camp we love so well...*) But camp songs are likely to come out of my mouth unexpectedly from time to time.



**Mary & Rick Kokan**



I used to stress over preparing vespers and especially Password, since I didn’t have any experience with those activities. I relied on books I brought from home for ideas. It would have been helpful to have a comprehensive library with resources for counselors to use in the staff lodge.

Staff training the first week of camp led by Lloyd was the most helpful and relevant experience that prepared me for not only camp, but my teaching career and the rest of my life. Chris Protzmann, Nancy Hoppe and Bruce Rasmussen were great mentors.

◆ **One staff member became a special friend of yours – your husband, Wrangler Rick Kokan. Can you briefly tell us the story?**

Yea. Well, I started crushing on Wrangler Rick when I heard him sing his ballads at campfires. Rick and my sister Joan were friends, and often went out sailing during free time. One day when he asked her if she wanted to go sailing, she told him that she had other plans and that he should ask me. He did and I got into the sailboat with him and absolutely no wind. We kind of kept our budding relationship on the DL (at least we thought so), but I understand Rick endured some teasing. We had some special moments toward the end of summer watching the sunsets over the corral and the lake. We got married 6 years later and now we’re both retired and living happily ever after in a house that we built on Amy Belle Lake where my family home used to be.

◆ **Any special skills you learned or developed while at camp?**

I learned many relationship building skills while at camp. These formed the basis of my interactions with students as I moved into my

# Camp is Antidote

## “Summer Camp: Our Kids' Antidote to Pandemic Living”

By Andy Pritikin



Since March 2020, our kids have been living an increasingly bizarre, unnatural life of screens and quarantines, hybrid schooling (if they're lucky), and enough fear and disappointment to last them into adulthood. However, in the midst of the insanity, we learned that *summer camp* can become a beacon of hope, a lifeline towing them back to their normal selves.

Many camps were in operation the summer of 2021. While strict safety guidelines and a modified program where necessary, the fundamental essence of camp remained intact: Kids, playing together, mentored by caring staff, and in most cases — *outdoors*.

According to the campers, parents, and staff at camps that ran last summer, it was by far their most meaningful camp experience ever, as well as an impactful life event.



This year, our children's need for the benefits of summer camp will be crucially important:

◆ **Real Human Connection** — Zoom and remote learning have saved us in so many ways. But there's *no* substitute for real human connection. Making and strengthening relationships while being guided by loving people is what camp is all about.

◆ **Reacquainting Ourselves with Nature** — While society has been trapped indoors for the past year, most of the world is *outdoors*, and it is amazingly beautiful, and fills our soul with joy. Our bodies yearn for the outdoors, and that's where most summer camps happen.

◆ **Resiliency** — Our kids are certainly developing it; experiencing disappointments that will make them stronger. Learning to be brave and confronting challenges and fears are also important facets of resiliency.

◆ **Mental Health** — Kids are resilient and can bounce back quickly. But a year and a half of stress and anxiety is bound to leave a mark. Extroverted kids are suffering, missing the energy of their peers. Introverted kids may seem to enjoy sitting in their homes, away from life's normal pressures — but they need social interaction just as much.

### Why Can Summer Camps Be Successful During a Pandemic?

Good camps breed creative adaptability and get things done. How do you get a group of 8 year old boys to listen? What do we do

### Where Stories Begin

Between two natural lakes on 150 pristine acres, YMCA Camp Minikani is a place where campers canoe and swim; build fires and friendships; try archery and explore the arts. However, camp is much more than a series of activities or a plot of beautiful land. Minikani is a community that is dedicated to inspiring your child's best self.

about the approaching storm? There's no electricity in the kitchen, and a kid pooped in the pool . . . Camp people don't complain — we figure it out and make it happen.

Last summer, we were able to do most of what we normally do at camp. Was it a little different than usual? Sure — but we accomplished it with smiles and appreciation.

Camp offers kids the unique opportunity to step back into a simpler time, with no internet connection or mute button needed. A place where a small community can have faith in the human spirit and support from one another without judgment, simply because it's the right thing to do.

Our kids need to be out of our homes, playing with other kids, and camps have proven that it can be done safely, even under the most challenging circumstances.

*Andy Pritikin is the Director of Liberty Lake Day Camp in Mansfield Township, NJ. He wrote this article for the Parent's Blog on the ACA website. Read the complete blog [HERE](#).*



## MAC Q&A's

◆ **Who can join the MAC?**

Anyone who has ever worked at Minikani is invited to join the MAC. We have 476 members on file, going back to 1953. There's a lot more out there that we'd like to bring into our Community.

◆ **How does membership help Minikani?**

We support Minikani with our donations, we send kids to camp, and we help to preserve Minikani traditions for the future.

◆ **Does membership help me?**

As a community, we keep you connected to camp and other staff you may know. We plan fun social events that also benefit Minikani. We publish a Newsletter 4 times a year to keep you up to date at camp and with other alumni.

◆ **What does it cost to join?**

Nothing. Well, actually, we give you the opportunity to donate money and your time to camp, but we never pressure you.

◆ **Can I quit if I don't like it?**

Of course.

◆ **How did the MAC get started?**

Back in 2009 a group of former staff realized they had a lot to offer Minikani – but felt they were under-utilized. By forming a Community they could be helpful to camp and benefit themselves.

◆ **Why I don't remember the MAC when I was at camp?**

A lot of the things we do are not visible right way. Maybe you remember getting a special Staff Snack – pizza or ice cream? We've also come to Staff Training sessions



in June and helped teach counselors special skills. We also show up at camp to help at Alumni Work Days – where we've painted, landscaped, put in piers, built lockers, cleaned, built program equipment, and other tasks to help Minikani.

◆ **Does the MAC only do things during the summer?**

Most of the things we do are not done in summer. We've had many Holiday Parties in December that bring alumni from all years together. We've sponsored an Alumni Weekend at the end of camp so our members and their families can come back to Minikani and have fun. We've also held "Dinner Around the World" to bring together alumni from different cities, states, and different parts of the world. In 2019 we held a reunion Music Festival for alumni. Most recently we put together a Minikani Song Book with 99 songs that anyone can access for free online. (See page 2)

◆ **What happens to the money I donate to the MAC?**

A big part of it goes to send kids to camp in the summer. We also make sure they have transportation to and from camp and the right supplies when they're there. The other big thing we do with money is give it directly to Minikani. They've used it to improve the waterfront, remodel buildings, buy program supplies, etc.



◆ **Do you ever sell our contact information?**

No. Occasionally one staff will want to get in touch with another staff from years ago. Then we ask the second person if they want us to share their email address with the first person.

◆ **Who runs the MAC?**

We have a board of directors with officers and members that meet by phone every other month. In addition, we are incorporated by the state and are recognized by the IRS as a nonprofit with 501(c)(3) status.

◆ **Is the MAC the same as the Minikani Advisory Board?**

No. Their Board helps make decisions for the operation of camp. The MAC is an independent group that simply supports Minikani.

◆ **What's the best thing about the MAC?**

There are so many things. We are a caring group made up of 100% volunteers. We've given thousands of dollars from our donors right back to Minikani. Over our 12 years we've sponsored almost 50 campers. Together we honor the time we spent working at camp and want to make sure future generations of campers and staff will have the same great experience.

◆ **Where can I get more info?**

Try checking out our website: <http://minikanistafflodge.com/>





# Nature Notes

By Bruce

Wisconsin winters can be rough. Daytime highs rarely top 30°F and at night it dips well below freezing, with an average of 40 inches of snow around Minikani. A week in Florida or a weekend at a lodge might help us make it, but those options aren't available for our furry friends, the mammals.



There are over 70 species of mammals that live in Wisconsin, and for the most part they are all successful at surviving the winter. Those that are less tolerant of cold temperatures and reduced food sources have special adaptations to make it through the harshest months. For the purpose of this article, only mammals that live at Minikani are included.

We don't have any bears in residence, but we have another champion hibernator, the ground squirrel. It can survive 6 months of the year asleep in an underground burrow without food or water. While hibernating, its body temperature drops to that in the burrow and heart rate decreases from 300 beats per minute to 10.



Chipmunks are seldom seen in winter. But they are active below ground, feeding on stored food and in the coldest weather can lower the body temperature in a state of partial hibernation. Flying squirrels, which camp has living in beech trees in the Pioneer Unit, don't store food, hibernate or even fatten up for winter, but are simply adapted to the cold. Their solution during extreme cold snaps is to cuddle in groups inside their cozy tree nests.

Most of our larger mammals adapt in the winter by building up fat and growing thicker fur. Raccoons, squirrels, skunks, rabbits, and foxes do not hibernate, although they may spend the really cold days tucked away in their homes or dens. Hollow trees, the underground burrows of other animals or even abandoned buildings help them keep warm. Deer grow thicker fur and often take shelter sleeping under pine trees. The dense, low branches protect them from wind and falling snow.



Opossums may suffer the most from a very cold winter. They rarely share a nest with other opossums and will spend bad weather days in abandoned burrows or brush piles. Their hairless ears and tails often get frost bitten and it is unusual to see an opossum that still has the tip on its tail. The average life-span of a Wisconsin Opossum is just 2 years.

Shrews are mammals that resemble a mouse, with the exception of their long, pointed snout and carnivorous eating habits. Because shrews are so small and have such a high metabolism, they have to eat a lot – some consume two to three times their body weight each day. That means they're active day and night throughout the year. In winter, they use underground tunnels or grassy runways under the snow to find prey, mostly insects, but also slugs, worms, amphibians and other small rodents.



Recent research in Germany documented an amazing feat that helps the shrews survive the brutal cold – they actually shrink in size. Their spines shorten and major organs, including the brain and liver, shrink by as much as 30%, and then rebound in spring. And you thought you had trouble getting your brain into gear on a cold winter morning – just be glad you're not a shrew!

