



# NEWSLETTER

# 2024

January 2024  
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Thanks To: Chris Haworth and  
Hillary Lobenstein

Bruce Rasmussen, Editor  
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Sometimes when I interview an alumnus for a "Spotlight" article I ask them if they liked Opening Day or Closing Day better. To me that's an easy answer: Opening Day. I guess it's just who I am. I'm a morning person. I like getting a "new fresh start" when it's available. As a teacher, I looked forward to new classes in the fall.

Maybe that's part of the reason I stuck around camp for all those years. At camp it always meant a new set of campers, new skill sign ups and a chance to work with kids and staff. Opening Campfire. One more campout. One more set of Camper Repots. Then just one or two weeks later you got to start all over again. Before you knew it, it was time to put camp away at the end of the season.

2024 is now upon us with all of its possibilities. The MAC's schedule of events for the year (see page 2) is penciled in and already has alumni thinking and planning. I have four new Newsletters, board meetings, fundraising, and new alumni to look forward to.

What about you? Maybe this is the year you enjoy Minikani Around the World, or sign up for the Alumni Weekend in August or the Holiday Party in December.

I've heard it said that the word *Menukinee* means "a place of beginnings". We all have fond memories, experiences and friends that began with Minikani. It's not too late for any of us to add MAC events to our list of beginnings.



# MAC Events 2024

The MAC volunteer Board of Directors meets every other month for one hour. Individual Directors and Committees then work together to plan and focus on the following five MAC activities for 2024. We hope these activities will bring Minikani alumni together with fellowship and service.

## The Weekend of March 1-3 Minikani Around the World:

In past years this event was originally called Dinner Around the World and was held on a Saturday. We updated the name last year because we didn't want to limit it to just a dinner or just one day during the first weekend in March.

The whole idea behind this event is to have alumni **connect** with other alumni, no matter where they live. It's just that easy. All of us have a special 'bond' that we share with other alumni – our experiences at Minikani. Minikani Around the World encourages you to reach out and call/ text/ email/ visit/ party with/ your Minikani friends. Who wouldn't want to do that? More information about setting up your own event is on page 5 of this Newsletter.



## Possibly Thursday June 13th???

### An Evening at Staff Training:

Let's hope that Minikani once again invites us to join them for an evening during their Staff Training. If so, alumni get a chance to meet the new staff and the staff get to hear all about camp 'back in the day' from the alumni. The event might involve group rotations, or a panel discussion. It might include dinner together and maybe even a social event. We'll keep alumni informed through email and social media if we are invited to join the staff this year.



## The Whole Month of May Membership Month:

It is absolutely true: Anyone who has ever worked at Camp Minikani is invited to become a member of our Alumni Community. Membership is always "free" and lasts for your lifetime. There are no dues or other requirements for membership. We do, however, have a Mission Statement (see page 4) and some of the things we choose to do as members will involve an expense. Obviously, participating in August's Alumni Weekend at Minikani will be at your expense. So will attending the Holiday Party in December.

We feel strongly that part of our mission as alumni is to give back to Minikani. We help sponsor kids at camp with camperships and help out in other ways when we can. Last year we gathered sleeping bags and other supplies that the international counselors needed. We supplied



counselors and staff with materials that were greatly appreciated. Financially, we operate as an IRS credited Non-Profit. This gives us the opportunity to collect donations from others and pass them along to Minikani. We have chosen to do most of this during the month of May, when a lot of us are thinking about summer camp. Last May our generous alumni contributed over \$3,600 to support our Mission.

## Weekend of August 23-25 Alumni Weekend:

Have you ever thought what it would be like to be able to return to Minikani as a camper? You could enjoy all the skills, campfires, meals, songs, games, and waterfront activities you did as a kid. Part of the fun would be staying up late (after taps!) and sleeping in a cabin. Now a semi-annual event, alumni and their families are invited to spend a weekend back at Minikani in late August, just doing camp things. What a great way to once again have fun at camp.

## Sometime in December MAC Holiday Party:

This is a social gathering that includes drinks and light food and an opportunity to raise money for our Campership Program. You can learn all about the great party we had last December at Third Space Brewing by reading the article on the next page of this Newsletter.



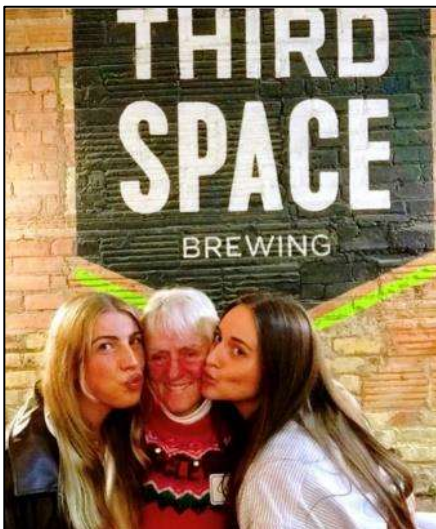
# Holiday Party 2023

By Hillary Lobenstein



Minikani alumni friends gathered at Third Space Brewery on Saturday, December 23rd to celebrate the holidays and to raise funds for camperships. We were able to raise over \$2,300 at this event to help more kids attend camp. This year, Sam Smith, a new member of the Minikani Alumni Board, spearheaded the event with tremendous success. Sam's LT1 year was in 2008, and he was on staff for five summers until 2015. A huge thank you to Sam for planning and organizing this year's Holiday Party!

All party-goers enjoyed a Third Space beer, wine, or hop water due to the kindness and generosity of Kevin Wright, Andy Gehl, and



Third Space Brewery. At this year's party, we all enjoyed the digital photo booth.

Finally, the basket auction and 50/50 raffle were both a phenomenal success! Kristen Hasbrook was the lucky winner of multiple baskets, and Mary O'Malley won the 50/50 raffle! Robby Gral won the Winter Snack Basket; he was excited to share the jalapeno beef sticks with his camp friends later in the evening. The Lego Flower Bouquet was a sought after item by many individuals; a shout out to another new MAC board member—Keri Robertson Fuenzalida for the donation of the Lego set.



As the party wound down, Minikani alumni put to use their LT learned skills—take initiative, help without being asked, and notice what needs to happen—to clean up the event. As I was cleaning up with other Minikani alumni, I thought how fortunate I am to be part of this enduring group of incredible people. From humbly sweeping the area underneath the dining hall table while waitering, we have gained so many skills, and our lives have been altered by “Mama Minikani.” We are able to look up, laugh, love, and lift.



# Please Help

We are losing contact with our alumni members!



Every time we send out a MailChimp email to our members, we get a report back showing the email addresses of people whose delivery “bounced”. This means that the email couldn't be delivered. It means that one of our Minikani alumni won't be able to read about what's happening with the MAC and what's going on at Camp Minikani.



90% of our bounces occur because the alumni's email server doesn't accept the email for a variety of reasons. With MAC members, it's mostly because the email address we have on file is an old address from when they were in school. They always end in .edu. All schools are different, but typically the school email address only remain usable for a few months to a year. *(Continued next page)*

Check the email address on this email – If it was sent to you at an .edu address, then the clock is ticking for you. All you have to do to fix it is reply to this email and give us your current email address that doesn't end in .edu.

Here is a list of alumni we 'lost' in the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of 2023. Their LT I year is in parentheses. If you have contact information for them, please ask them to email us ([minikanistafflodge@gmail.com](mailto:minikanistafflodge@gmail.com)) so we can bring them back into our community.

- Kelsey Gusho (2008)
- Flint O'Connor (2021)
- James Jorgensen (2012)
- Connor Robertson (2013)
- Haley Robertson (2012)
- Sarah Bachmann (2016)
- Martha Herrenbruck (2013)
- Dan Thompson (2007)
- McKenna Kohlenberg (2008)
- Maggie Navarre (2016)
- Elizabeth Amherdt (2008)
- Sabrina Fox (2015)
- Rachel Whaley (2007)
- Will Conley (2008)

**Note:** We hate to think about it here, but alumni always have the option to “Unsubscribe” to our email delivery, and that’s guaranteed by the MailChimp service we use. If you really can’t stand seeing another MAC email in your inbox, simply click on the “unsubscribe” link and MailChimp will never deliver another email from the MAC again. Ouch – just writing that makes me cringe!



## MAC vs Minikani

Some alumni find it easy to confuse Camp Minikani with the Minikani Alumni Community. That’s understandable – they both have “Minikani” in their name! The truth is, they both want kids and staff to have a great time when they’re at Minikani. Perhaps if you think of their separate origins it will help make their differences more clear to you.

Minikani was started in 1919 by the Milwaukee YMCA. They eventually bought over 150 acres on a beautiful Wisconsin lake and have held a camp there for kids ever since. On the other hand, the MAC was started in 2009 by a group of former staff members who wanted to keep connected to their favorite camp, Minikani. There are almost 700 members, all of whom have worked at camp.

Here’s a short list of what the MAC does **NOT** do:

Minikani Alumni Community doesn’t operate Camp Minikani. We don’t hire counselors or make sure certain people get into the Leadership Program. We don’t maintain the camp grounds, make decisions about schedules, campers, staff, skills, or trips. We don’t operate the Dining Hall or plan the menus. We don’t pay anyone’s salary. Minikani is owned and operated by the Milwaukee YMCA, and they do all of these things.

So what does the MAC do? You’ll find the answer to that question in our Mission Statement, which is found in the next column. For clarity, we have used **bold** to highlight the action verbs found in our Mission.

### MAC Mission Statement:

The Minikani Alumni Community is a group of former staff members dedicated to maintain our **Connection** with our summer homeland. Through act of **Fellowship and Service**, we strive to **Honor** our past experiences, **Support** summer programing, and **Preserve** Minikani traditions for the future.



## Contact the MAC

Thank you for reading the MAC Newsletter. Hopefully it will help you stay connected with what’s going on in our Community and with Camp Minikani. The Newsletter is published four times a year – January, May, Summer and October.

We also maintain a website that is available 24/7. New alumni can join the MAC here, and members can update their contact info here. Anyone can download the latest Newsletter or “Contact Us” here as well. And there’s an “Events” tab to help you keep track of – events! [www.minikanistafflodge.com](http://www.minikanistafflodge.com)

We have a group on Facebook that is only available to alumni. Use this link: [MAC FACEBOOK](#)

And of course, we have an email address that will get you a quick answer to your questions: [minikanistafflodge@gmail.com](mailto:minikanistafflodge@gmail.com)



# Minikani Around the World 2024

MAC’s very first “Minikani Around the World” was in 2012, but we called it “Dinner Around the World” in hopes of getting alumni to participate. The idea was to take a ‘kind of boring’ Saturday in early March and bring it to life with groups of Minikani alumni doing things together all over the world. Although the original premise is still valid today, last year we encouraged lots of different activities besides ‘dinner’ to bring alumni together to celebrate Minikani.

For 2024 we’d like to focus on the first weekend in March and get as many alumni as possible to join us. Here’s what’s involved in four easy steps:

**Step 1:** Anyone can decide to hold an ‘event’ in their part of the world. It could involve a meal, or just a get together. Previous events have been a potluck, meeting at a local restaurant, or getting together in someone’s home or party space. This is probably one of the most popular events, as is just socializing at a local watering hole. (See “Possible Events” in the next column for more ideas.)

**Step 2:** The next step would be letting your camp friends and other alumni in your area know about your event. That’s where the MAC can help. We plan to send out an email to all of our members late in February with information and cities about the events you have planned and that **YOU** send to us. ([minikanistafflodge@gmail.com](mailto:minikanistafflodge@gmail.com)) We also have a Facebook group, an Instagram account, and a website that we’ll use to let everyone know

what’s going on and where. If you want, we can also send you the email addresses of alumni who live in your city, state, or zip code.

**Step 3:** Have fun! Enjoy! See old friends and meet new ones! Share your camp stories with others.

**Step 4:** After the event, we’d love to have you tell us what you did and how it went. Use Facebook if you want, or email us a short summary at [minikanistafflodge@gmail.com](mailto:minikanistafflodge@gmail.com).

### Possible Events:

It could be breakfast at a truck stop anytime of the day. Maybe a ‘bar hop’ with designated drivers. A movie night with camp-related movies. Could be an outdoor hike in a park or a campfire with s’mores. Actually, there’s almost no limit to what the event will look like. Some alumni who are too far away to get together in person might want to set up a FaceTime or Zoom and share the link with everyone. Others may choose to use the time more personally and take the opportunity to look over their Minikani memorabilia – music collection, photos, ragger’s materials, etc. All it takes is a little creativity and leadership on your part. What would you like your MAW to look like?

**Question #1:** “I just moved to the Minneapolis area and don’t know any alumni there. I’d love to get together with anyone with a Minikani background. What can I do?” A good place to start would be Facebook. We have over 643 people in our FB group (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/28911858611>). You could post a note with the group asking if anyone is interested in celebrating Minikani with a MN newcomer. You can also contact us at the MAC. We have

almost 700 members in our data base and can sort them by state, Zip Code, etc. Looking at our data now I can see that we have 20 people who live in MN, with about half of them in Minneapolis or a 554XX Zip Code. We can send them an email with your contact information to see if anyone is interested.

**Question #2:** “I live in New Mexico. Any alumni here?” Sorry, it looks like you’re the only one in the whole state. Maybe setting up a Zoom call and posting it on Facebook is the best way to find others. One other idea - our data base also lists the LT I year for most of our alumni. If yours is, say, 1984, I can find 9 other people who were in your year. Maybe invite them to a Zoom call?



Chicago 2015

### 2015 Report:

*In Chicago, about 20 of us came together for deep dish pizza and a whole lot of fun. Carl was the mastermind behind a new party game, called "Chief's Cup." The game had us planning skits, singing camp songs, and pranking one another well into the night. It felt like we were transported back to camp for a night. Amy Owen*



## Explorer 110

**YMCA Camp Minikani has been a home away from home to generations of campers since 1919.**

In our 105<sup>th</sup> year, Camp Minikani looks to grow our impact by inviting an additional 110 Explorer campers each summer.

**Expansion leads to a brighter and healthier Minikani.**

Each summer, over 360 campers experience the Explorer Unit. With constantly long waiting lists, another 100 potential campers, ages 13-15 miss out on the magic of Minikani.

After this expansion of adding 2 new yurts, the Explorer Unit can comfortably hold 16 more campers per session, including a new one week mini-Explorers option, for a total of 110 more campers each summer.



More Explorers leads to more Leadership Trainees and youth counselors and role models. These additional teen leaders will build their skills at Camp, leading to a stronger pool of applicants for future staff positions.

Camp Minikani has received a commitment from an anonymous **YMCA of Metropolitan Milwaukee board member for a challenge grant of \$50,000** to

the Explorer Expansion 110 Campaign. This board member is making this new commitment with the specific intent to strengthen unity between the Association board, the Camp Minikani board, and Camp Minikani alumni.

**Explorer Expansion Phase I:**  
Construction of new bathhouse  
Opened Summer 2023

**Explorer Expansion Phase II:**

- Construction of 2 new yurts and furniture
- Updates to existing yurts
- New trailer, canoes, tents, and camping equipment purchased.
- Repairs to current 6 Yurts.
- Expanded Dining Hall outdoor deck.
- Enhanced kitchen infrastructure.

**Additional YMCA Investments:**

- New full-time, year-round Explorer Trip Director position added to camp staff.
- New Explorer base camp in northern Wisconsin.
- Three new Explorer summer counselors.



## Best Camp Decade?

**YMCA Camp Minikani Explorer 110 Campaign**

*By Hillary Lobenstein*

Ready for a little healthy competition between staff alumni decades? Does your decade dominate?

I obviously believe the 1990s staff is better than all others! Sorry Nature Bruce!

Donate to the Minikani Explorer 110 Campaign in honor of your staff alumni decade: 1960s, 1970s, 1980s, 1990s, 2000s, 2010s, & 2020s. We have been challenged to a matching grant of \$50,000 by an anonymous YMCA of Metro Milwaukee Donor. This individual will match our donations until **January 31, 2024.**

Please consider donating to the Minikani Explorers Program Expansion <https://www.minikani.org/donate/> Please designate your decade in the comments of your donation!

“The **Explorer Program** allows campers to break out of their shell and grow in a unique way. They are not only outside their comfort zone, but truly challenged on their ability to work with a team and adapt to situations. When up north, campers must work together to make food, set up shelter, and learn to function in a new environment.”

Miranda Olson,  
Explorer Unit Director



# Valentine's Day

Have you been in your grocery store or the local Walmart lately? If you're like me, I know what you're thinking. Here comes another big 'made up' holiday. (No, not Groundhog's Day. That's a real day to celebrate!) Thanks to the flower industry, greeting card companies, jewelers, candy makers, and especially fancy restaurants, now we all have to get ready for Valentine's Day.

By the time the 15<sup>th</sup> of February rolls around, Americans will have spent \$26 billion to celebrate this special day for lovers. But wait – there's more to it than candy hearts and champagne. This special day has a long and interesting history that might interest you.

It's a bit of a tangled yarn, woven with threads of pagan tradition, Christian martyrdom, and cultural evolution.

Let's start our look back with its ancient Roman roots. February 13th-15th belonged to **Lupercalia**, a raucous fertility festival dedicated to Faunus, the Roman god of agriculture, and Juno, the goddess of women and marriage. Spring was in the air, and thoughts of new life included activities like animal sacrifices, matchmaking rituals, and not-so-romantic whipping rituals

believed to increase fertility.

Hey, if it works, keep doing it.



**Saint Valentine(s):** Historians believe there were actually several St. Valentines, making the story murky. Two possible contenders were martyred on February 14th in different century (6<sup>th</sup> & 8<sup>th</sup>), possibly for defying Roman Emperor Claudius II's ban on marriage for young soldiers. Both were beheaded as punishment against their Christian faith.



Now the story begins to transition and evolve. By the 14th and 15th centuries, notions of courtly love flourished, and the middle of February, believed to be the start of birds' mating season, was linked to romantic expression. Poets like Chaucer associated the day with love verses. Honoring St. Valentine provided a Christian context for the day, even if this connection to romantic love was largely speculative.

By the 18th century, Valentine's Day was firmly established as a day for couples to express their affection with flowers, chocolates, and gifts, especially jewelry. For the next two centuries ideas about love, romance, and seasonal symbolism intertwined, shaping Valentine's Day into the holiday we know today.

The story of Valentine's Day is a fascinating mix of faith, folklore, and cultural expressions. It culminates with sugary candy hearts (8 billion), romantically dripping greeting cards (145 million) and jewelry gifts (\$5.5 billion). Don't forget the flowers and an evening out for your beloved one!

Happy (almost) Valentine's Day!



## Valentine's Day F.A.Q's

- Q. Who spends more money on Valentine's Day?  
A. Women expect to be treated to about \$154 worth of V-Day treats, but only end up spending around \$64 for their significant other.
- Q. What percent of people don't like Valentine's Day?  
A. Overall, about a quarter of adults (**23 percent**) have negative feelings about the upcoming holiday. Those negative perceptions include feeling lonely, sad, disappointed, annoyed, stressed out or nervous; some even dread it.

# The Power of Camp

What do you think is the universal motivator is that brings campers back to camp; the one thing that gets kids to come back year after year?

I'll make the question easier for you and give you some possible answers to choose from:

- A) The great variety of activities and Skills
- B) Independence or being able to create one's own schedule
- C) Silly evening programs
- D) The facilities and the fine-dining experiences
- E) The enthusiastic and caring counselors
- F) Having FUN – that's what it's all about.

Want to know the actual proven answer? While all the answers above are important for a successful camp stay, none of them rose to the top and became the most influential facet of their camp experience. The one thing that truly causes campers to return to camp is ... friends. (Youth Development Outcomes of the Camp Experience. Forster, G. (2009))

Yes, my friends. They say "Camp friends make the best friends", and I believe it.



Chris Haworth

◆ **What is your history at Camp?**

My first summer as a camper was in 1986 in Cabin 10 with Jim Lang as my counselor. My last summer was in 1998 when I was an Expedition Counselor. I grew up in Whitefish Bay and many friends went to Minikani each summer so I paired up with Greg Toledo to do one week in the summer of 1986. Greg and I both went on to be LTs but then he moved on to become a counselor at Camp Manitowish.

My favorite skills were Camp Crafts (Wilderness Survival), mainly because of the rope swing, and canoeing/sailing because I had never done either prior to Minikani. I vividly remember coming to a "B" session for one week and not liking Camp and being homesick on day 1...but by the end of day 2, I knew I wanted to be a counselor someday.

◆ **Did you have a favorite "job" at camp?**

Wait, being a counselor was a job? I think that was the best part of the "job" was that it was never a "job." But yet the skills I learned there prepared me well for any future, real job I had. But if I had to pick one job that I liked a lot, it was during Winter Camp and serving hot dogs to the kids from the kitchen. We butchered those things up with tongs and made sure they had extra heavy hot dog juice when we served them to the campers.

◆ **What song makes you think of camp?**



Matt Armstrong & Chris

Too many to choose from! But, the one that stands out most is "Sabotage" by the Beastie Boys. Former alum Matt Armstrong and I pushed to have this song played at every Camp dance and I believe it's still played to this day with the counselors going crazy on the dance floor. Runners up would be "You Shook Me All Night Long" – AC/DC, "Sugar Mountain" – Neil Young, "Leaving on a Jet Plane" – John Denver, "Sample in a Jar" – Phish.

◆ **Were there any special skills you learned while at camp?**

A hard skill I learned was camping/backpacking and just an overall appreciation for nature and being outside. From cabin campouts at Range East to backpacking on Isle Royale, those moments have been seared into my memory for a lifetime. A soft skill I learned while at Camp was the ability to get along and find commonalities with almost anyone. This pushed me to embrace social opportunities and grow as a person.

◆ **How did you make the transition from camp to the "real" world?**

After my last summer at camp I lived in Madison for a couple of years and worked for then-Gov. Tommy Thompson before moving into a marketing position at the



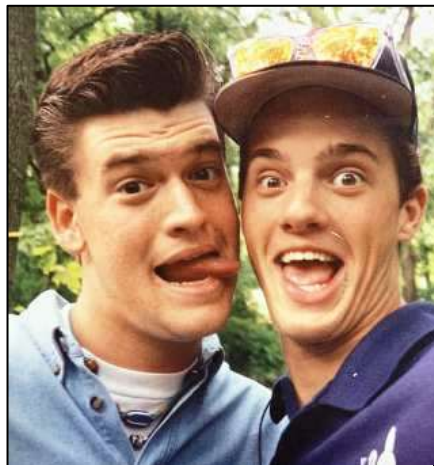
Wisconsin Department of Tourism. I then moved back to Milwaukee in 2000 where I worked in marketing/advertising for companies such as Marcus Hotels & Resorts, Clear Channel Outdoor, and now, Wilkins Media. Currently, I'm Vice President at Wilkins Media and have been with the company for 10 years. We are an out-of-home media specialist that partners with clients when they need out-of-home media anywhere in the country (billboard, transit, airport, mall, etc.)

**◆ If you could go back in time and re-live just one Special Day, what would that be?**

I can't pick just one! There are three that definitely stand out: Star Wars Day, Harley-Davidson Day, and the Summer Olympics. The ad-staff and counselors really went all out to make these as memorable as possible for the kids.

**◆ We've had counselors go on to work for YMCAs and a whole bunch go into education, but you went in a different direction. What camp 'skill' did you turn into a lifelong passion?**

During the summer of 1991, many of the staff stayed after the regular camp sessions to volunteer as counselors for the Chicago Lung Association (they brought up kids from Chicago who had asthma challenges and sponsored a week at camp for them). Several of us regularly played volleyball after dinner during free time. A fellow counselor and high school classmate of mine, Eric Peetz, suggested that I try out for the team at Whitefish Bay High School and that I could be good enough to make varsity. At the time I was playing JV football but was too skinny to really make an impact, so I took a chance and went out for the team. I wound up starting by the end of the season and by my



**Erik Peetz & Chris at camp**

senior year I earned All-Conference and All-State honors before being recruited to play in college. In my senior year of college at Lewis University our team advanced to the Final Four and played against UCLA on ESPN.

After college I continued to play and be involved with USA Volleyball at the national board level, but around 2009 I was recruited to referee. I was immediately hooked and have been a NCAA volleyball referee ever since working in conferences such as the Big Ten, Big East, Horizon, Missouri Valley, etc. I met my wife because of my involvement in the sport and all three of our kids play as well. I look back and can't believe how that one decision to randomly play volleyball at camp has framed my life the way it has.



**Chris at work  
Badgers Vs Hoosiers**

**◆ Did you have a favorite food?**

I loved grilling burgers when I was a counselor for campouts as well as during Wilderness Survival on the last day of each skill session.

**◆ Anything else to share?**

All three of our kids are attending Minikani this summer! Levi (17) and Reagan (16) are LTs and Penny (8) will do 2 weeks overnight this summer. It's humbling and a blessing that they now share my love for Minikani.



**Chris and Family**

There's too many people to thank for how much Minikani has meant to me and my family. It truly provided a 2<sup>nd</sup> home for me when I was a kid/teen and some of my best friends have come from Camp. I think back to all the counselors I had when I was a camper and how each one shaped me in some way including Jim Lang, Rob Tegtmeier, George Doty, John Huber, Andy Mendelson, and countless other staff along the way.



# Nature Notes

By Bruce

## Earthworms

This is the worm you're probably most familiar with - either from fishing, gardening, or just being outside after a rain. Their scientific name is *Lumbricus terrestris*, which simply means worm/earth.



The worm's muscular body is lined with bristles that help it anchor in the ground. The adult's body is divided up into 100 – 120 segments. They have a mouth and anus, with a digestive system in between. Inside each segment is a pair of structures that removes cell waste from the worm's body – similar to our kidneys. They also have a small group of nerve cells that can be called a "brain". Just behind the brain they have 5 pairs of hearts – all in a row. Adult earthworms have a yellowish "collar" near their front end called a clitellum.

Earthworms are hermaphrodites, meaning they have both male and female reproductive organs. However, they cannot fertilize themselves. Two earthworms will mate by lining up belly to belly and head to tail to exchange sperm. Each

worm then produces a cocoon that contains its fertilized eggs.

Ecologically, earthworms are essential for healthy soil. They aerate the soil by burrowing through it, which allows air and water to reach the roots of plants. They also decompose organic matter (decaying roots and leaves, plus animal manures) which releases nutrients into the soil that plants can then use. Earthworms are also important in numerous food chains – just ask any robin!

Here is a little-known fact: When the glaciers covered North America with ice and snow over 10,000 years ago, all of the worms died. This means that earthworm in the U.S. today are decedents introduced by European settlers, probably in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Today, unfortunately, there is a new worm in town that just may give the earthworm a run for its money.

**Jumping worms**, are non-native, invasive earthworms from eastern Asia that were first confirmed in Wisconsin in 2013. These worms, which grow up to six inches, are known to have a "snake-like movement," are often found in large numbers, and will "thrash, and spring into the air and can even shed their tails to escape," when they are disturbed. They generally are found in light soil and leaves, and burrow only a few inches in the soil. They are darker in color with comparatively rigid bodies.

Ecologists are concerned that jumping worms will harm the delicate balance of life already found in forested areas. They don't improve the soil as earthworms do, and may not be as "tasty" to other critters in a food web. Jumping worms will normally out-survive



## Jumping Worms

other worms as they can reproduce twice in a season and repopulate quickly. This is because they have a more streamlined way of reproducing. Jumping worms are parthenogenic, which means a single worm can reproduce by itself without a mate!

One positive is that Jumpers do not survive over winter. However, their egg-filled cocoons that were shed the previous year by adult worms will survive Wisconsin's winter and begin hatching in the spring. The DNR suggests that if you find jumping worms, remove and destroy them when you can. Simply seal them in a plastic bag and throw the bag into the trash – they will not survive long



## Did You Know?

- ◆ In one acre of land, there can be more than a million earthworms.
- ◆ Earthworms can feel vibrations, and often avoid predators by sensing their footsteps.
- ◆ They can also sense light and moisture.
- ◆ An earthworm can eat up to a third of its body weight in a single day.
- ◆ Average lifespan for a worm is 4 – 8 years.