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Camp Wanake Information Dissemination: Retreatant Literature and Materials

Erica Rymer
ejc43@zips.uakron.edu

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Camp Wanake Information Dissemination: Retreatant Literature and Materials

Erica Rymer

School of Communication

Honors Research Project

Submitted to

The Honors College

Approved:

McKenna Vietmeier Date 4-17-18
Honors Project Sponsor (signed)

McKenna Vietmeier
Honors Project Sponsor (printed)

Juan E. Contreras Date 04/16/18
Reader (signed)

JUAN E. CONTRERAS
Reader (printed)

Mark Rittenour Date 4/17/18
Reader (signed)

Mark Rittenour
Reader (printed)

Accepted:

Heather Waltee Date 4-17-18
School Director (signed)

Heather Waltee
School Director (printed)

Kathleen Clark Date 4/18/2018
Honors Faculty Advisor (signed)

Kathleen Clark
Honors Faculty Advisor (printed)

Date _____
Dean, Honors College

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Overview

In this project I explore communication with the Nonprofit Wanake Camp and Retreat Center. Communication was not clear, and many adjustments to tactics had to be made, eventually resulting in a failure to distribute the research survey. Because of this, all data collected was from previously conducted research studies, and does not expand on new information.

The project also intended to create promotional materials. By no means did the process go smoothly, and many of the materials I originally intended to make were not created. Without the research results from the survey, it could not be calculated which materials would be helpful, and which were unnecessary. However, the materials included were created by me in lieu of the materials initially suggested.

Overall, the project was a great learning experience, though not in the way originally anticipated. Instead of learning how to create materials, I learned that experiences in the real world can be complicated and messy, and some of the greatest tools in a PR specialist's arsenal can be planning and patience. These are now skills I can now carry with me in my future endeavors.

Abstract

Retreat groups are an integral part of nonprofit camp communities. Their attendance and volunteer efforts directly correlate with the success of the organization. Therefore it is necessary to understand why retreat groups visit camp environments and volunteer their time, as well as how they prefer to receive information in order for them to be best supported throughout their experience. It is key, as a nonprofit, to understand the best and most efficient methods of presenting retreatants with information, so that retention is increased and communication uncertainty is decreased. In addition, it is essential to understand the communication processes within the nonprofit organization in order to determine the most efficient way to disseminate information based on staff ability.

Keywords: retreat, retreat group, retreatant, training materials, instructional materials, media hierarchy, media packet, nonprofit, information dissemination, camp

Retreatant Literature and Training

Nonprofit organizations have long relied on volunteer contributions to make a difference and accomplish their goals, and many of these volunteers are originally introduced to the camp environment as retreatants. However, in order to promote volunteering, as well as keep current retreat groups returning to our organization, it is key to understand what motivates retreatants to become involved. This analysis is based on demographic factors, such as age and interests. These factors play into what a volunteer can do within an organization and the overall roles they would be interested in. This starts with creating a supportive environment that retreat groups support, as well as care about the success of.

By definition, volunteering is non-obligatory assistance (Beehr, Legro, Porter, Bowling, & Swader, 2010) given by an individual to support another. However, not all volunteers give of their time of their own free will. Some retreat groups are automatically involved in volunteer activities as a part of their stay, often as compensation for housing or services rendered, instead of paying a higher fee. This is common practice within Wanake Camp and Retreat Center, the environment in which this study will take place. The definition of “volunteer” has become less concrete because of the diversity in volunteers as well as in the formal and informal nonprofit organizational base (McAllum, 2013). For this reason it is important to understand what motivates a retreat group to support and feel supported by the camp environment. Once these motives are understood, I will be able to better provide for the needs of Wanake’s publics, as together we recruit more retreat groups and volunteers to our organization.

The need for information stresses the importance of informative materials, such as schedules and maps, for the support of retreat groups. These items increase the likelihood of a retreatant’s return and future involvement with camp volunteering. Materials allow us to

properly expose retreat groups to Wanake's facilities, events, and procedures in a way that is comfortable, prior to and during their time on-site. Comprehensive distribution materials can be the difference between a "happy camper," and a retreat group who will not only never return to our camp, but who may spread bad publicity and prevent future retreat groups from visiting. Therefore, it is essential to provide retreatants with everything they will need to be comfortable, entertained, and informed during their stay.

Literature Review

Retreatants

As long as there have been summer camps, there have also been retreat groups who utilize camp services in the off season. These individuals have diverse backgrounds and interests that lead them to the camp, which also fuel their desire for volunteerism with the organization. Some people volunteer because it defines them as an individual, while others volunteer because it is required of them. In order to understand our retreatant volunteer population we must first understand what motivates them to volunteer based on demographics.

The first group to consider are adolescent retreatants. Teen volunteers more than tripled in number between 1989 and 2004 (Bortree, 2010). Generally they are affiliated with a religious or school organization (Carr, King, & Matz-Costa, 2015). Because this case will be studying and affecting Wanake, where it is common practice to accept volunteerism as part of compensation for a retreat group's stay, it is likely that this study will encounter groups of adolescents who will be volunteering. I must be prepared to relate to these individuals clearly and effectively. Research shows that teens expect trust, satisfaction and commitment from a volunteering or retreat experience (Bortree, 2010). It also shows that they work best with guidance and in groups.

The next retreat group to consider are adults. This category is difficult to analyze because no two adults are alike when considering what the role of camp means to them. Some adults see participating in retreats and volunteering activities as part of their own character, and they participate in events almost constantly in any manner available to them. These volunteers, being experienced and enthusiastic, tend to require fewer supplemental materials, because of the regular nature of their involvement. Another group of adults are those who participate in events out of obligation. These are usually either members of an organization, or the parent of a child

retreatant. These individuals are involved because it is too much of a hassle to avoid the activity. They tend to work well, but not extremely diligently, and they only complete tasks which can be clearly understood. These individuals require task-oriented direction and a clear set of instructions in order to work best, and are an ideal target for material distribution. They will do what they are certain is available to them and do not make high-risk decisions. In addition to these two groups, there are also adults who participate in specific cause. They tend to be connected to that organization in some way. For example, alumni of a university. These visitors are loyal to a point. While they are hard-working, it is difficult to change their practice. They have a tendency to do things “the way they have always been done.” They do not require much instruction in the traditional performance of tasks, but they do require assurance, detailed instruction, and community support when it comes to implementing new practices. Successful adult retreatants and volunteers across all demographics tend to keep in mind three things: they need to be a good person before being a good volunteer, they must find what is unique about the nonprofit they are working with and support it, and they cannot regularly expect the expression of gratitude (Romainoli, Nencini, & Meneghini, 2016).

The final group to consider is the elderly population of retreatants. People aged 75 or older are more than twice as likely to volunteer their time than any other age group (Carr, et al., 2015). Unfortunately, trends in the last few years show that fewer and fewer older individuals are volunteering because of the increase in the number of their children and grandchildren who live at home and require their support (Bulanda, & Jendrek, 2014). For these groups, it must be stressed that in order to live a healthy and rewarding life, it is important to connect with others their age. These groups should be provided with information about bonding experiences, such as group hikes, or available group challenges and activities. Those that get involved do so because

they tend to have the unique perspective of remembering when the world was “a better place”. For these individuals, volunteering and group participation is the cure to vulnerability and loneliness (Ingen, & Wilson, 2016). Those who are not working or taking care of their families have time on their hands to participate in volunteering. While usually very competent, the elderly are not always fit for physical volunteer work. However, they are usually enthusiastic about hands on tasks that are organizational or creative. Their skills from earlier in life can also be handy, depending on what they did for a living, and can provide a great outlet for both volunteering and enjoyable group activities.

Though I have established how each group functions, there is a lack of information on how retreat groups prefer to be communicated with, so this project must delve more deeply into this topic. In order to create an effective set of materials to present, we must look into the type of materials these individuals would prefer to receive.

Informational Retreatant Materials

There are many ways to present informative materials. For this project, we are looking into print media, which limits the scope. Unfortunately, there is a lack of research into the successes of each method. This project will attempt to utilize collected research to determine what information ought to be included and how it might be organized.

Communication Within a Nonprofit

It is no secret that there are a wide variety of nonprofit organization types. Some are comparable to larger for-profit organizations, making significant financial transactions and housing sufficient staff to complete any and all tasks. Others are at the opposite end of the scale, working donation-to-donation in order to fund their efforts, and housing a small staff that has difficulty addressing all tasks with equal precision. Between the two is every combination of

funding amount, staff size, and employee efficiency imaginable. According to Marlene N. Wiggill (2011), there are three key communication factors that make it difficult for many nonprofits to achieve their goals: a lack of financial resources to employ a communication department, a lack of formal communication training, and the absence of staff qualified to handle complex communication situations. Because of this, I may encounter situations in which Wanake employs available staff to discuss research tactics, rather than equipped staff. I may also need to expand upon why research methods and materials for equipping our public are essential, since it is unlikely I will encounter individuals who have been trained on the importance of communication. Though it is clear that communication is an essential function to any organization, one of the greatest communication challenges I may face is seeking to engage with a nonprofit whose understanding of communication functions may be narrow and incomprehensive (Koschmann, et al., 2015).

As Wanake is a small nonprofit organization with only five year-round employees, this analysis will be studying the difficulties in communicating with a nonprofit with minimal staff and minimal funding. One primary concern is the intricacy of human interaction. When working with larger organizations, communication channels work like a machine where someone is always prepared to fill every needed role. However, with a smaller staff, communicating with the organization may be comparable to interpersonal communication in which communication is not linear and is used for much more than to simply transmit information (Koschmann, et al., 2015). “Communication is filled with intricacies such as nonverbal behavior, unintended messages, multiple interpretations, conflicting motivations, and changing contexts that cannot be explained in terms of a sender-message-channel-receiver model of communication” (Koschmann, 2015, p. 205). In addition, the workload of each individual is greater than that of an individual in a larger

organization, which can create “noise,” or communication interference which may disrupt, delay, or distract from communication. Some nonprofits can recognize that communication and relationship management, or an organization’s attention to and maintenance of relationships with external entities, are necessary to the organization. Unfortunately, most communication with nonprofits occurs unplanned and without clear relationship objectives (Zorn, et al., 2010).

Despite these hindrances to straightforward communication, I anticipate a willingness from Wanake to give communication their best effort since they care about the success of their organization. This is supported by their vision “to offer places, programs, and role models away from daily routines and distractions for all who seek God to experience life-change, a new friend, time with God, and a lot of fun.” “Nonprofit organizations, in particular, have an obligation to be good stewards of their resources because they are entrusted with those resources to benefit the public good” (Pressgrove, & Weberling Mckeever., 2016, p. 194). In addition, as a smaller nonprofit with limited funding, we would anticipate Wanake to prefer the provision of free materials over employing someone outside of their agency to draft materials for a fee.

Research

It was determined that the best method of data collection was to directly survey retreat groups and individuals to determine how they would prefer to be reached and informed. An eight-question Qualtrics survey was created to determine the group size, duration of stay, and availability of materials prior to the creation of new materials. The survey also included questions to determine materials requests, in order to quantify how many of Wanake's retreat groups from 2016 and 2017 want each of the offered materials. In addition, a textbox was included for materials requests aside from those suggested in the survey.

Summary of Research Questions

Q1. How long did your group stay at Wanake?

Q2. How large was your group?

Q3. How well were you assisted by staff while at Wanake?

Q4. What materials did you have access to before arriving at camp?

- A list of staff member contacts
- A list of meal options and prices
- A list of available camp activities, prices, and times
- A map of the grounds, identifying available lodging, activity areas, bathhouses, and the dining hall
- A list of items (such as sports equipment, music stands, etc) you would be able to use during your stay
- A list of upcoming events
- We were not provided with any resources

Q5. Which would you like to have if you were to return to Wanake in the future?

- A list of staff member contacts
- A list of meal options and prices
- A list of available camp activities, prices, and times
- A map of the grounds, identifying available lodging, activity areas, bathhouses, and the dining hall
- A list of items (such as sports equipment, music stands, etc) you would be able to use during your stay
- A list of upcoming events
- We were not provided with any resources

Q6. During your stay, which materials did you have access to? A list of staff member contacts

- A map of the grounds, identifying your group's lodging, activity areas, bathhouses, and the dining hall
- A meal schedule
- A list of staff member contacts
- A schedule of activities you planned, as well as extra options for free time
- A list of available equipment and where to find it
- A list of events coinciding with your stay
- Procedures for cleanup
- None

Q7. Which of these materials would you like to have access to while at camp in the future?

- A map of the grounds, identifying your group's lodging, activity areas, bathhouses, and the dining hall
- A meal schedule
- A list of staff member contacts
- A schedule of activities you planned, as well as extra options for free time
- A list of available equipment and where to find it
- A list of events coinciding with your stay
- Procedures for cleanup
- None

Q8. Are there any other resources it would be helpful to be provided with?

Method of Distribution

Distribution and collection of results proved quite difficult over the course of the project. The survey was given to Wanake for edits and revisions in early December 2017, with the expectation that the survey would be distributed in January and slowly accumulate resulting data over the course of the semester. According to the results of the literature review, despite Wanake's small staff, a month should be sufficient time for a staff member to review the survey. There was no reason to expect Wanake to cause an intentional stall of communication, since they personally requested my assistance in creating these materials.

Unfortunately, in mid-January, Wanake directing staff communicated that the survey had just been given approval and had yet to be distributed. As materials creation depended on research results, an offer of assistance was extended to distribute the survey in a more timely manner. Wanake unfortunately had concerns about the survey being sent from an outside source, as retreatants may think that the camp sold their information. The camp insisted on distributing

the survey themselves. Assurances were made that the survey would be distributed by early February.

By February, the survey had still accumulated no results. I again reached out to Wanake, who once again stated that the survey had not been distributed, this time citing a contact list issue. Again help was offered and refused. Research conducted before this project did not indicate that I should anticipate an unwillingness or inability on Wanake's part to distribute the survey. Though they have a small staff, they were given sufficient time to review and distribute an eight question survey, and were regularly available for long phone conversations about the process, which would indicate having time to send the survey. As they were unwilling to share the contact information, the only option available was to have patience and to continue to check in on the progress with distribution, offering help and encouragement where appropriate.

In late February, the survey was distributed from the link sent in December, which had expired. This caused distrust from many of the individuals who would have originally been willing to respond, and lowered the chance of collecting results in the real survey. This was when Wanake reached out and asked for assistance, so I set a time to meet on the phone, at which point we walked step-by-step through the distribution process, including where to input contacts and how to send. The conversation took place in real time, which led to a misinterpretation that, after the call, the survey had been sent.

Unfortunately, after a week, the survey had still not been taken by a single retreatant. A call was made to Wanake, who relayed that they scheduled the survey to send the following Tuesday. Again, the only course of action was patience, and to remain available for assistance. Tuesday came and went, and still no results. It was at this point that Wanake stopped accepting communications.

The real, executable survey file was never distributed.

Results

Since the survey was never distributed, materials could only be created on the basis of what I already know was required. A conversation occurred with Wanake prior to the start of the project, which outlined a list of materials they were without. A search of the camp website found many of these materials already present. If Wanake had hired someone to create these materials in order to avoid struggling with the contact list, it would explain their lack of willingness to communicate.

I decided that a pre-retreat brochure, which could not be found on the website, was the best option for fulfillment of the final project. In addition, I could create an event insert for the brochure, and a color-coordinated map, which could be given to Wanake as a digital file, or a tactile paper example.

Reflection

In hindsight, there could have been further steps taken to avoid miscommunication. One step that may have assisted from the beginning is sitting down with the staff, face-to-face to establish a timeline for each phase of the project. Clear deadlines would have meant the prioritization of actions which were, in this case, pushed back in lieu of other work. With a better understanding of when the materials would be made, the Wanake Staff may also have been less likely to outsource the project, since they would have had some say in the project timeline, and would know what to expect. Though adequate time was given to take action, these expectations may not have been clear.

In addition, it was revealed half-way through the project that Wanake would not be able to share contact information. Had this been communicated earlier, research data could have been

collected by another method, such as a print version of the survey that could be given to retreat groups while on site. This would not have cast as wide a net for results, but it would yield data without requiring any contact information, and without much effort on the part of Wanake staff.

Overall, I learned that planning a project with an outside entity can be just as important, if not more so, than putting work into the project itself. Without strict deadlines and a willingness to share and meet expectations from both sides, this project could not very well come together. Because of this, it is important to consider scheduling in future endeavors. Patience is beneficial to an extent, but without deadlines and an end goal, patience can quickly become stagnation, and projects may never reach completion.

Materials Introduction

Included with this project is a single set of materials meant for the purpose of recruiting new retreat groups. These pre-retreat materials include a trifold brochure outlining available camp activities and facilities, and a removable insert highlighting current and upcoming events. The brochure contains constant information that needs no updates unless considerable changes have been made to housing or available activities. The insert, on the other hand, is both time and target sensitive. It should be updated to fit the needs of the public you are reaching out to.

For example, if the materials are being given out at a family event, such as the Resurrection Egg Hunt, they may outline upcoming family events, such as the Fall Festival or Live Nativity. If the materials are being mailed to volunteer groups, they may highlight future volunteering opportunities. It is essential to regularly update the insert in order to keep your target publics informed. I have included a general insert template which can be edited as events pass and new events and opportunities are made available.

The format of these materials is meant to be straightforward and portable. Both items should be printed on standard 8.5x11 inch paper. The insert should be cut into thirds (as there are three inserts per print) and placed inside of the brochure, which can be folded into thirds around the smaller slip of paper. Once folded, the brochure should have the name of the camp on the front and the camp contact information on the back. The set is the ideal size for mailing to retreat groups, or for handing out during retreats or events.

Unfortunately, due to the lack of research results, further materials were unable to be narrowed down. However, for future results, you may consider creating your own survey to determine if this brochure filled a need that was present, or if retreatants still have needs that

have yet to be met. You could also rotate out the event insert with any materials requested on an individual basis.

Looking Forward

As mentioned in my opening statements, this project did not go as expected. Moving on from this point, there are many lessons I can take with me in the future.

First of all, I learned it is important to make a schedule and stick to it. Without clear deadlines, it is unlikely things will be completed with adequate time to complete all tasks. Allotting specific time frames for each action prevents procrastination, as well as avoids rushing. A schedule also keeps everyone involved with a project informed on when tasks will be completed and when to expect a finished project.

Second, I learned that not everyone I encounter in the future will have communication training, and it may be my responsibility to maintain open channels of communication in order to keep a project going. Though a project is my top priority, it may seem less important to individuals or groups I am working with, so reminders, encouragements, and extending help may be necessary in order to move forward.

Last, I learned that failure is not necessarily failure on my part. Sometimes a situation just does not come together, but rather than letting that hold me back, it is important to learn from my mistakes and move on in order to do better work in the future.

Artifacts

Included in the appendixes are all of the materials created for the fulfillment of this project in hard copy form.

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JULIE LAUTT CAMP DIRECTOR

“Wanake is a spiritual home for me. It was the first place I was a camper, and it is where I first met Jesus as Lord and Savior,” says Julie. “My greatest hope as director is to be able to provide everyone who visits our site with the same opportunities for life changing experiences as I had.”



VISIT US FOR:

Business Trainings
Team Building
Vacations
Family Reunions
Conferences
Sports Team Training Retreats
College RA Training/Outing
Scouts Camping Trips
Youth Group Retreat
Outdoor Education Program
Summer Camp
AND MORE!!!

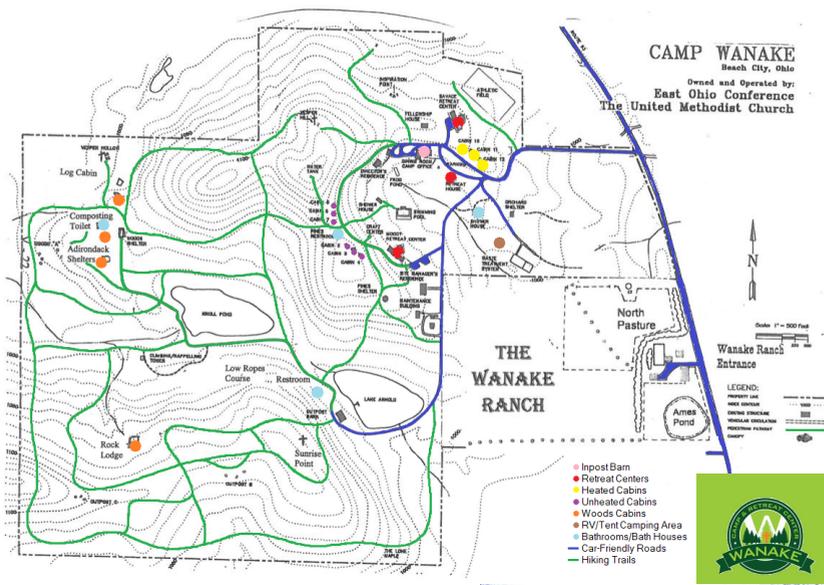
CONTACT US

www.campwanake.org
9463 Manchester Ave SW -
Beach City, OH 44608
Phone: 330-756-2333
Fax: 330-756-2300
Email: info@campwanake.org



WANAKE

CAMP AND
RETREAT CENTER



Retreat Houses:

1 night = \$77/person

2 nights = \$102/person

Heated Cabins:

1 night = \$54/person

2 nights = \$74/person

Unheated Cabins:

1 night = \$44/person

2 nights = \$64/person

Deep Woods Lodging =

\$10/person/night



FREE ACTIVITIES

Indoor Game Room

- Pool Table
- Ping-Pong Table
- Carpet Ball
- Foosball Table
- Playing Cards
- Assorted Board Games
- Comfortable Seating Area

Sports Facilities

- 100 Yd Athletic Field
- Outdoor Youth Length Basketball Court
- Indoor Half Court Basketball Court
- Four Square Court
- Outdoor Volleyball Court

Nature and The Great Outdoors

- Hiking Trails Across 200+ Acres of Land
- Fishing From the Shore of Lake Arnold and Knoll Pond
- Campfire Circles for Groups of All Sizes

Playhouse Equipment

- Cornhole
- Bocce Ball
- Lawn Darts
- Frisbees
- Basketballs
- Soccer Balls
- Hula-hoops
- Volleyballs
- Pool Noodles
- Beanie Babies
- Jump Ropes
- Blindfolds
- AND MORE

OTHER PROGRAM

Wanake Ranch Activities

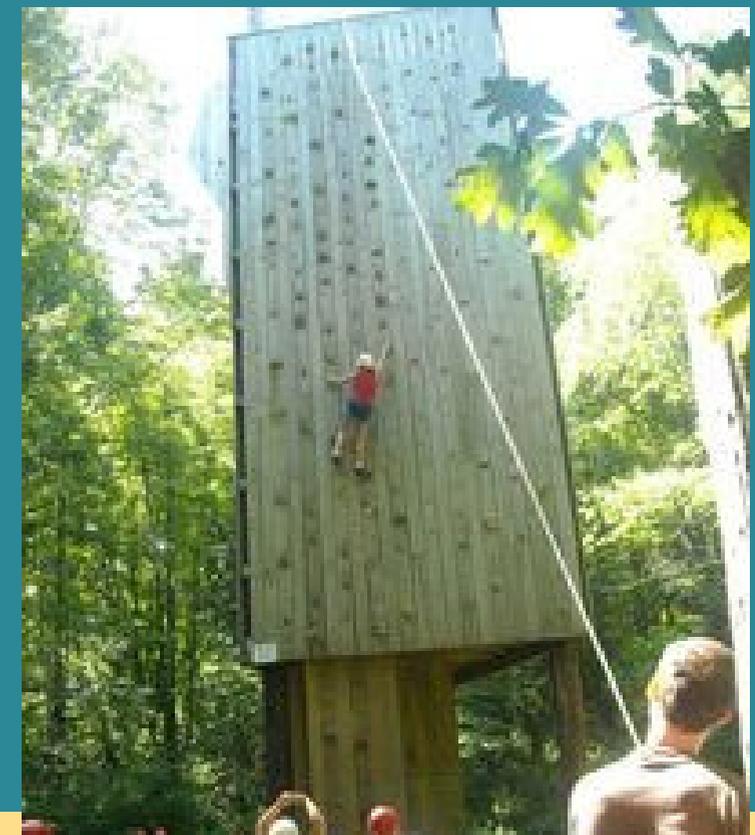
- Horse Experience
- Trail Rides
- Pony Rides

Outdoor Adventure Activities

- Indoor 14 Ft Climbing Wall
- Outdoor 47 Ft Climbing and Repelling Tower
- Challenge Course and Team Building
- Canoeing/Fishing from Boats
- Guided Hikes/Night Hikes
- Guided Stargazing

Other

- Swimming in Wanake's Open-Air Pool
- Wagon Tours
- Barn Dancing



Upcoming Events



Resurrection Egg Hunt and Summer Camp Preview Day

Free Event for Everyone!

Egg hunt for children infant through High School.

Saturday, April 7, 2018 from 2-6 PM

Alumni Work Weekend

May 18-20, 2018

Alumni Work Week

May 20-24, 2018

Cost: Donations accepted. Food and lodging for the week are valued at \$209 Register on line or obtain further info from the Wanake office by contacting Emily Cook at 330-756-2333 or info@campwanake.org.



Trail Rides at the Wanake Ranch

Available most days with a reservation.

Cost: \$45/ person

To reserve a ride, contact the Ranch at 330-987-0411 or 330-756-2333 or info@campwanake.org.

Horsemanship Lessons at the Wanake Ranch

Tuesdays at 3:30 PM and 4:30 PM and Wednesdays at 3:30 PM and 4:30 PM, April through May and August through November. For Adults, Teens, & School Aged Children ages 8 and up
Spring lesson semester (8 lessons): April - May
Fall lesson semester (12 lessons): August-November
Winter lessons are available upon request.

Cost: \$30/lesson

Spring semester (8 lessons) is \$240 and Fall semester (12 lessons) is \$360 and can be broken into payments. Sibling discounts are available.

To register, contact the Wanake office at 330-756-2333 or info@campwanake.org.

*See www.campwanake.org for more!!

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Cost: \$30/lesson

Spring semester (8 lessons) is \$240 and Fall semester (12 lessons) is \$360 and can be broken into payments. Sibling discounts are available.

To register, contact the Wanake office at 330-756-2333 or info@campwanake.org.

*See www.campwanake.org for more!!

Upcoming Events



Resurrection Egg Hunt and Summer Camp Preview Day

Free Event for Everyone!

Egg hunt for children infant through High School.

Saturday, April 7, 2018 from 2-6 PM

Alumni Work Weekend

May 18-20, 2018

Alumni Work Week

May 20-24, 2018

Cost: Donations accepted. Food and lodging for the week are valued at \$209 Register on line or obtain further info from the Wanake office by contacting Emily Cook at 330-756-2333 or info@campwanake.org.



Trail Rides at the Wanake Ranch

Available most days with a reservation.

Cost: \$45/ person

To reserve a ride, contact the Ranch at 330-987-0411 or 330-756-2333 or info@campwanake.org.

Horsemanship Lessons at the Wanake Ranch

Tuesdays at 3:30 PM and 4:30 PM and Wednesdays at 3:30 PM and 4:30 PM, April through May and August through November. For Adults, Teens, & School Aged Children ages 8 and up
Spring lesson semester (8 lessons): April - May
Fall lesson semester (12 lessons): August-November
Winter lessons are available upon request.

Cost: \$30/lesson

Spring semester (8 lessons) is \$240 and Fall semester (12 lessons) is \$360 and can be broken into payments. Sibling discounts are available.

To register, contact the Wanake office at 330-756-2333 or info@campwanake.org.

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