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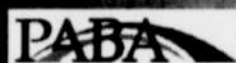
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community

Family Matters

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YWCA's CampOUT enters 35th year of
LGBTQ family camping on the coast

BY RYAN J. PRADO

While it may seem like a distant mirage right now, summer is, according to painstaking historical record, right around the corner. The arrival of this sorely missed season means jaunts to the edges of the metro area for secret swimming holes, river walks, bicycling and hiking. For others, it means the arrival of the best time of year for packing up the tents, sleeping bags and bug spray for a dalliance with Oregon's many outdoor camping options.

For the last 75 years, the folks at the YWCA of Greater Portland have anticipated these looming, sun-dappled days of adventure with an eye 90 miles southwest of Portland, to the 500-acre scenic coastal retreat of Camp Westwind. Perhaps lesser known is that Camp Westwind, located just north of Lincoln City, has for the last 35 years played host to CampOUT—an LGBTQ family camp, held August 10-14 this year. And while returning same-sex couples with children, along with their allies and friends, gear up for kayaking and campfire sing-alongs, YWCA staffers are struggling to spread the word about CampOUT before it's too late.

Nestled at the mouth of the Salmon River Estuary, where several ecosystems converge for a largely unspoiled natural habitat, Camp Westwind imbues a sense of consciousness to youth and adult campers alike. In the case of CampOUT, the values, activities and recreational opportunities remain the same under this umbrella. Still, in an effort to manifest Camp Westwind's credo of "encouraging community, embracing diversity," CampOUT organizers seek to provide not only a beautiful

environment in which to spend time with your friends and family but a welcoming, inclusive camping adventure.

YWCA camp director Janette Kunkel reports that though CampOUT began primarily as a lesbians-with-kids seaside outing, over time it opened up to more male couples with children. That number, however, remains lower than she'd hope.

"I think there are just more lesbian couples having children or adopting children as opposed to the gay male population," says Kunkel. "I think that's just in the last decade become more common, where we have gay men adopting kids.

They might not even know that CampOUT is there for them."

Possibly in part because of this lack of awareness, the last few years have seen low attendance for CampOUT—in what has affected its footing in the YWCA's larger camping program. Camp Westwind's

capacity for campers is around 130, and in 2010, CampOUT registration managed only half of that. While the numbers have been low, Kunkel is optimistic that getting the word out not just to same-sex couples with children, but also their friends and allies, can help carry the program to a new level of exposure and participation.

If the support and glowing testimonials from longtime CampOUT campers is any indication, the program seems poised to provide summer memories for years to come.

Nine-year CampOUT attendee Sue Theissen's oldest daughter, now 37, went to Camp Westwind when she was a child. Theissen's youngest daughter, now 19, went to Westwind

"It is a safe environment where families can be together, being exactly who they are without any of the bigotry of the outside world leaking in."

-SUE THEISSEN



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