



# The Rocky Mountain American Baptist

A Special Edition Newsletter to the American Baptist Churches in the Rocky Mountain Region

## The Path to Discernment and Decision

by Ken Pinkham

I volunteered to chair the Board of Managers at Black Forest Camp and Conference Center because I have a deep compassion for camping. I learned rather quickly this past year that we cannot continue our ABCRM camping at Black Forest in the way it exists today.

Our vision statement for Black Forest Camp and Conference Center is to “provide a Christ-centered, spirit-filled facility for all ages and all churches to experience spiritual growth, fellowship and harmony that fulfills God’s will, with primary marketing initiatives focused on the constituency of ABCRM.”

Camping has drastically changed throughout the country with our children being given more options for their time during the summer; e.g., sport activities, mission trips and many global activities. More school districts are moving in the direction of a year-round schedule. Black Forest has not kept up with the necessary improvements to ensure a financially sound and at least a 70% participation rate from

our ABCRM. Eighty-five percent of what is done at Black Forest is for groups or individuals that are not ABC. In the past three years only seven ABC churches have used the facility each year for church activities. Financially, Black Forest is not self-supporting and operates on a day-by-day budget with urgent maintenance needs of over \$250,000. Frankly, we are not being very good stewards of God’s kingdom at Black Forest.

I attended the Camping Task Force meeting in Wyoming last month where we heard Desmond Hoffmeister talk about different alternatives to the way we do camping today. Desmond spoke again to the Black Forest Board on February 5, 2005, explaining all the options under consideration that will mean significant changes to camping as we see it today. A unified statement was drawn up by the Black Forest Board and approved a week after our February 5<sup>th</sup> meeting.

The unified statement from the Black Forest Board is as follows:



*The Black Forest Camp Board covets your prayers during this time of deep spiritual discernment. We are presently focusing on the valued ministry of camping and conferencing here at Black Forest. We are aware of the deep emotional connection because of the many meaningful experiences at the camp by so many. We take our responsibility to preserve this heritage seriously. The Board is seeking to exercise responsible leadership and good stewardship by facing the many hard realities brought about by changing circumstances. The task is difficult because the implications of our decisions are far reaching. We are seeking to answer the question, “How will camping and conferencing look in the future, and how will our Lord equip us to fulfill this ministry?” All the options under consideration will*

(continued on page 4)

# The Time for Decision is Now

by Desmond Hoffmeister



At my installation service at the Fort Collins Annual Session, I committed to seek to be obedient to Jesus Christ, be honest with what I see, and lead you to the path of life and transformation. In communicating with you as a Region family, I attempted to highlight the plight of many churches as well as the challenges we are facing in these daunting times which are filled with many new opportunities. These opportunities can only be realized if we accept the inevitability of change. Accepting these facts means that certain options are very unattractive.

The status quo cannot remain. If things remain the way they are, we will become spectators of our own demise and inevitable death. Putting our head in the sand hoping that things will magically change and rearrange themselves “the way they were” is wishful thinking and short-term avoidance. Hoping that “God will work it out” at the expense of facing our responsibility is a great temptation. Doing this will result in a temporary “high.” These are tried and tested options of failure.

I have tried to bear witness through words and works to the enduring hope of the gospel. I have spoken to many churches of the God of new beginnings. God makes old things new and miraculously uses seemingly hopeless situations as highways of hope. God does not need our permission to use our structures, methods, and traditions. In fact, God is greater than our creation. God, therefore, does not follow us; rather, we follow God.

The easiest part of change is coming to terms with it intellectually. Most of us agree to change if it does not affect us. Change involves discernment, counting the cost, and then decision. Decision involves the resolve to act on convictions. Regardless of the magnitude of change, it is always accompanied with various degrees of pain.

Over the past months the Region Board working in seven Task Forces has discussed various components of a new vision. With core values and a clear focus in a wholesome new pastoral culture, we are building the systems to facilitate growth, and a new structure that will become a vehicle for ministry rather than a drain on our energies. The toughest challenge is doing things more efficiently, taking advantage of good trends, and acknowledging paradigm shifts.

Over the next month, I am inviting our region-wide community to deliberately engage in a process of discernment that will lead to a time of decision. We will talk about our dreams for our youth, pastors, and churches. How can we build real, supportive relationships? How can we collaborate to encourage each other? We will dream about how our churches can become healthy and grow. We will dream about ways we can start new churches.

The most tangible and tumultuous decision we will make involves camps in general, and Black Forest Camp and Conference Center in particular. This is difficult because of the sacrificial emotional, spiritual,

and financial investment so many have made for five decades. I have met many people whose lives have been impacted positively because of the ministry of camping. Many couples met at the camps. Others met Christ and were called to ministry at a church camp. Many others deepened their relationship with God because of the ministry of camping.

Different solutions have been proposed for the various camps.

- Grand Mesa will continue as a seasonal camp run by an independent board comprised of two partners.
- The proposal for Wyoba is that it will be incorporated independently. According to this proposal, Wyoming Baptists will carry out camping ministries in partnership with other parties who have an interest in the ministry.

The size, history, and location of Black Forest warrant special attention. After considerable analyses of data involving financial viability, stewardship, utilization of land and facilities, attendance trends, exposure to more liabilities, potential threat to the current tax status, developments in the area surrounding the property, and many other factors, the Black Forest Board at its March meeting resolved to recommend to the Region Board to initiate the process to sell Black Forest.

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This recommendation comes from the Board of Black Forest Camp and Conference Center. This Board has been entrusted by the Region to be custodians of the best interest of Black Forest. The Board agonized over this decision for some time and spent a month in discernment and prayer. The officers of the Region motivated by their task to exercise responsible and proactive leadership voted to make the same recommendation. The Department of Administrative Services and Church Development, empowered through our By-laws to buy and sell real estate, have made the same recommendation. On March 30, the Executive Committee met to consider the same facts and express their mind on the matter.

In April, the three Areas will meet to discuss the new vision, focus, and structure for our Region. At the same time, we will seek comment on the proposed sale of Black Forest. We are encouraging many members of our churches to come to these meetings and express their opinion on this issue. We want to be sure that when the Board meets at the end of April the churches have had maximum opportunities for input and participation. It is crucial that we have as many of our churches present at these meetings as is possible. Obviously, these gatherings will not therefore be "business as usual."

This has been a difficult process for me because of my deep respect and love for so many people invested in Black Forest. My first meeting with the Region was at the Senior Adult Conference at Black Forest. On those very memorable occa-

sions, I met seniors who told me how special Black Forest has been. My first day in the office last July 1, I had great dreams of what we could do with Black Forest. Over a period of eight months, I was overwhelmed by facts, trends, and opportunities to suggest different directions. To those who feel betrayed by their expectations of my leadership in this regard, I express regret.

### **Intervention that will give us a change must be drastic, directed, intentional, and immediate.**

I have previously said that any intervention that will give us a change must be "drastic, directed, intentional, and immediate." My proposal is that we

- focus our vision,
- change our structure,
- sell Black Forest Camp and Conference Center,
- develop new, effective ways of pursuing camp ministry,
- invest the returns on the sale of the property wisely to ensure a stable Region,
- provide dynamic and lasting ministry to and for our churches, and
- impact the world by enabling churches to preach the gospel to the world.

This is a time for prayer. It is a time to listen. All of this must lead to a time for decision. The decisions we make must give birth to a new day. I value your prayers and your support for the proposed changes.

*Desmond Hoffmeister is the Interim Executive Minister of the American Baptist Churches of the Rocky Mountain Region.*

## **2005 Area Meetings**

### **Area I — April 8-9**

***CHANGE: FINDING OUR WAY***

**Hosted by First Baptist Church of Rock Springs, Wyoming**

**Speakers: Dan Vincent, Desmond Hoffmeister**

**Other program highlights: a panel discussion on our Region's vision, prayer clusters, mission presentation.**

### **Area II — April 15-16**

***CHOOSING TO CHANGE***

**Meeting at Beaver Run Resort and Conference Center in Breckenridge, Colorado**

**Worship Leader: Bob Garcia  
Speaker: Desmond Hoffmeister**

**Program components include Group Discovery and District Discussion.**

### **Area III — April 22-23**

***OPENING DOORS TO CHANGE***

**Hosted by First Baptist Church of Pueblo, Colorado**

**Worship on Friday evening with Desmond Hoffmeister, speaker.  
Worship on Saturday morning with Dan and Estela Schweissing.**

**Saturday's schedule offers ample time for discussion of Region ministry opportunities.**

## God's Holy Ground

I've been a camper since I was eight years old. It all started for me at a rustic camp in eastern Montana. Being a part of the Christian camping community has introduced me to many camp and conference settings in many states. I've participated as a camper, conferee, counselor, volunteer, speaker, group leader, and kitchen staff. For me, it's the experiences I've had that have made the difference. The commonality in all of those memorable camping experiences is God, not a location.

I recall standing around a camp fire high on a clay butte overlooking a campground. It was there God "nudged" me to give my testimony to my teenaged peers.

On a windy summer day on the prairie, I realized God was placing me in a position of leadership, and I said, "Yes, Lord, yes."

It was on the beautiful shores of a lake that I conversed with God about my future.

It was in a majestic Ponderosa pine forest that God reassured me that the way forward was secure.

As I walked among the redwoods near a large conference center, I received assurance that the thoughts I was planning to share with conferees were the right ones.

At sunset before evening vespers, God promised, "I can do more than you ask or even think!"

I could go on, but you get the point. God's holy ground is anywhere we walk with God. Where will God take us next?  
*Ingrid Dvirnak*  
*Coordinator of Communications*

## The Path to Discernment and Decision

*(continued from page 1)*

*mean significant changes to camping, as we have known it. We nevertheless believe that if God closes one door another opens with yet greater opportunity to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ to the whole world.*

All the board members were asked to be in constant prayer until our next board meeting, asking God for guidance as to the best option for Black Forest. The Black Forest Board met again on March 5, 2005. After a meaningful three hour discussion, the Black Forest Board approved the following resolution:

*We, the Board of Managers of Black Forest, have been agonizing over the future of the Black Forest Camp and Conference Center. We have endeavored to fulfill our fiduciary responsibility on behalf of the Region churches and in obedience to God. We have felt the weight of trust placed upon us to manage the valuable resources that God had placed in our care.*

*We carefully considered all the options to best pursue the valuable ministry of camping. We examined the relevant facts about trends in attendance, occupancy, financial health, relevance and expectations. We further weighed the rich tradition of camping and the deep emotional investment by so many over the past five decades. We rejoiced at the memories of the enormous impact the ministry at Black Forest has resulted in the changing of many lives. Our commitment to stewardship challenges us to justify the ongoing substantial financial investment to underwrite the operating expenditure. The cost of urgent maintenance needed is huge.*

*After considering all the relevant information, we resolved to recommend to the Board of ABCRM that the Black Forest Camp and Conference Center be sold immediately. Options involving the purchase of another camp, renting of a camp, partnering with other camps, or subsidizing camping for our youth should be vigorously pursued. Measures must be put in place to ensure the protection of the principle, so that only the interest is used for ongoing ministry in line with the mission that God has called us to. We understand that this decision may cause much pain. Our prayer is that the discussion about this emotional issue be done in a spirit of prayer and respect for one another.*

By mid-April 2005, the Black Forest Board will develop a detailed plan, so that our Regional Camping Ministry will continue in the year 2006 and beyond. The board wants to ensure a camping ministry will continue and be available to all members in the ABCRM if the Region approves the sale of Black Forest.

We ask for your continued prayers in these next couple of months. I pray that God speaks to each one of us individually and the final decision will be God's will for the BFCCC.

*Ken Pinkham chairs the BFCCC Board of Managers.*

# Look in the Mirror!

by *Mike Oldham*



Shortly after I graduated from seminary, two yoked churches called me as their pastor.

One church in a small town, First Church, was rapidly aging. When I arrived, the youngest deacon was 74. Within two years, two deacons made separate comments that stopped me dead in my tracks. The first comment was made after the Area Minister made a presentation to the congregation asking for support of a new church start in the area. The deacon said, "If they gave us the money they are going to pour into that church start, we could really do something with it." On another occasion, a deacon instructed me to go to inactive members to tell them if they did not start coming and giving regularly to the church, it would have to close.

As gently as I could, I tried to tell the church that the emperor was not wearing any clothes. Many things needed to change in this small congregation if it was going to survive. Throwing money at their building or "guilting" people into attendance was not going to solve any of their problems. The leaders of the congregation could not see beyond "keeping the doors open." They were deeply entrenched in survival mentality.

Rev. Hoffmeister is shouting to all of us, "The emperor is not wearing clothes." We can be angry, pout, stick our head in the sand, or look in the mirror. In the past month, I have

engaged in all of these activities at one time or another.

When I look at our Region in the mirror, this is what I see:

- We are a small Region (in number of churches). We have limited and declining financial resources, yet we operate in a huge geographic area.
- Support for BFCCC by ABCRM churches has declined in recent years. Churches are not sending as many kids to camp; directed financial support has dropped by \$10,000 since 2000; and revenue from direct usage by ABCRM churches makes up less than 10% of our annual camping revenue.
- These statistics are directly related to what is happening in many of our local congregations. Congregations are aging, so balancing a budget each year becomes more difficult. The future for them is often frightening and/or depressing.
- Each year, BFCCC struggles to balance its budget. The result is that we often neglect desperately needed repairs and upgrades, because we simply do not have the money to make them happen.

Rev. Hoffmeister is pushing the Region to consider the future of BFCCC within the overall ministry of the Region. I would challenge anyone who says he is simply doing this as a "quick-fix" to the Region's many problems. Simply put, there are no quick fixes to the problems we face as a Region. The only hope that we have to move beyond "survival" is to make the kind of "high leverage," systemic changes that Rev. Hoffmeister is challenging

us to consider. The sale of BFCCC is only one part of the many fundamental changes that Rev. Hoffmeister is proposing.

The question raised by Rev. Hoffmeister that brings the most clarity to this issue for me is this, **"What is our unique, God-given mission?"** The second question then becomes, **"Does the owning and operating of BFCCC for the foreseeable future fit in this fundamental mission?"** As much as I love BFCCC and the camping ministry, the answer I come to is **"No."**

The best way to be good stewards of all of our Region's assets is not to refuse to consider a different future. The reality is that because of the wisdom of our ancestors, we have been entrusted with a property that we can use to bring about life-saving changes.

Camping will not end. It will just look different. We will have the opportunity "re-invent" camping to meet the needs of 21<sup>st</sup> century youth instead of trying to force 21<sup>st</sup> century youth into an old model that is showing its age. ABCRM will still have Senior Adult Conferences, Women's Retreats, and hopefully, more Men's Retreats. Who knows what new conferences we might have?

It is time to start looking to the future with hope and excitement instead of despair and fear. A new day of ministry is upon us.

*Mike Oldham  
is the manager at BFCCC.*

. . .find an alternate plan for camping ministry

# Our Reflections on Black Forest Camp and Conference Center

by Tom and Betty Shoaf

This is a difficult time. We, like many others in our Region, have close ties to a place that represents commitment to a special kind of ministry. Camping ministry has given us opportunities to interact with and guide children and youth in a setting that reflects God's creation in an incredible way. We have been involved with Black Forest in a variety of ways for almost 50 years. Tom attended young adult weekends there in the mid 50s. After we married, Betty was a cabin counselor at the Junior Camps. Our two daughters attended camps there during the 70s and Betty coordinated Junior Camps in the years prior to the building of the Conference Center. Tom also was a counselor occasionally during those years.

When ground was broken for the Conference Center in 1984, Betty took part in the ground breaking ceremony. It was exciting to look forward to being involved in the expanded ministry of conferencing. From 1990-1993, Betty assisted for the spring and summer months by organizing the summer camping program. She helped recruit camp coordinators and assisted them with their camping weeks. She also was involved in the first three or four years of planning for the Women's Retreat in January. At the same time, Tom assisted in the office working with the conference center responsibilities. When Wendell Garrison, a former director, was on

leave due to the illness and death of his wife, Tom took on his duties for a period of about seven months. Since that time, we have attended many conferences and retreats.

We were very upset during the past several years when rumors of the possibility of Black Forest being sold began to circulate. We felt that the purpose of the sale would be to save the Region from financial disaster. That was everyone's fear. We think that now we can feel confident that whatever financial moves are made in the Region will be sound ones. And it is the responsibility of all of us to make sure that continues to be true.

While living on the grounds at Black Forest during the early 90s, we became very aware of the great amount of upkeep that was necessary to keep the grounds and the buildings suitable to attract outside groups to the conference center. We knew those "outside groups" were vital, since our churches were not using the center enough to keep it financially viable. We realized how difficult it was to keep the center's facilities sufficiently booked in order to bring in the dollars necessary to maintain both staff and facility just on a day to day basis. Maintenance was always a financial burden. As the buildings age, more and more needs to be done.

Our American Baptist churches have not supported Black Forest

enough to maintain it, and we do not foresee that they will in the future. We all want it, of course, but we haven't gone the extra mile to make it financially solid. Camp attendance has fallen and the percentage of ABC campers has also diminished in the past few years.



We have concluded, after much thought, discussion, and prayer, that we support the sale of Black Forest if the money is **invested** and a designated portion of the **investment income** used for continuing a camping program either by renting a camp or by purchasing an existing camp site. The property should not be sold until a viable alternative for carrying out the camping program is assured and available on a timely basis. Much study and investigation needs to be done by persons experienced in camping ministries. An adequate amount of money **must** be allotted for future use. The money secured from the sale must not be used in the normal budget of the Region.

Our prayer is that we will be able to find an alternate plan for ministry to our children and youth in a camp setting—a setting made available to us because Black Forest has given us the finances necessary to continue what has been a rich legacy.

*Tom and Betty Shoaf are members of FBC in Grand Junction, CO.*

# Guidelines for Change

by Roger Doane



When asked to separate “emotion” from “facts,” we find the task increasingly difficult to the degree that we are emotionally involved. Many adults in our Region have had “a meaningful camping experience” and want desperately to continue to offer that experience to their children and grandchildren. The question is not, “Do we want to continue a camping program?” but rather, “What is the best possible way to provide this camping program?” This is where emotions get in the way. We tend to *feel* if it was good for our parents, and good for us, it must be good for our kids and grandkids as well.

A week at a Christian camp used to be a “really big deal” for many of our youth. Times change; opportunities abound; old ways are replaced with new ways. The message of the Good News of Jesus Christ does not change, but the way we present it changes in order to reach children, youth, and adults where they are today, rather than where they/we used to be. What we need is to agree on some simple guidelines that will help us through this change. I suggest at least the following:

**1. Commit to continue to provide a quality camping experience.** As hard as this may be to fathom, this could mean creating a position of “Camping Director” without having a physical campground. Knowing the best camping sites available and guiding campers to them could be the main function of a person in this position.

**2. Demonstrate good stewardship in selecting the best options.** Not every church in the ABCRM is sending youth to BFCCC. My information is that less than 10% of the Region’s churches support BFCCC by sending a significant number of their youth there. Some are not sending any campers at all. Some have developed their own local activities and mission trips which provide a “meaningful experience” at less cost per participant with greater impact than sending them to BFCCC. While the number of campers at BFCCC steadily declines, the cost per camper increases. In turn, the results are less measurable. The question ultimately is, “Is it fair for all ABCRM churches to support a program used primarily by a small percentage of churches?” There may be a better way to provide the Christian experience we want for our youth without the current headaches of administration and marketing. We can leave those tasks to others.

**3. Be guided by the Holy Spirit in looking at options.** Christ promised the presence of the Holy Spirit to guide us into all truth and wisdom. We need God’s presence to help us separate emotion from fact and make wise choices.

**4. Provide a means for all churches to get involved in the process.** If there are solutions out there that are not apparent at this time, the time to express them is at the upcoming Area meetings. The Department of Administrative Services and New Church Develop-

ment has looked at several options. It is of the opinion that, short of a cash contribution to bring the camp up to code plus an annual, sustainable contribution to cover the operating shortfall, the Region would be better served to sell the camp. With facts and options clearly presented and the Holy Spirit guiding us in the decision, the right choice will be made. If the churches cannot come up with a viable option during the Area meetings, I think the Region Board would be obligated to pursue the sale of BFCCC.

**5. Do not compromise our Christian witness.** The Black Forest Camp and Conference Center, as we currently know it, cannot remain viable on camping fees alone. This means we need to expand the Conference Center part of the program in order to increase use of the facility and increase revenue. This is an option. This option, however, requires a higher level of expertise, greater investment to upgrade facilities to compete in today’s market, and a willingness to compromise our Christian witness when entertaining customers who are not sympathetic to our beliefs. Some customers have requested that the BFCCC staff cover the cross(es) and hide other references to Christ. I don’t feel we can ask God to bless that sort of venture.

I am not in favor of making a hasty decision. But if the decision becomes clear, there is no point in delaying appropriate action.

*Roger Doane is a member of FBC/Monte Vista.*

## **ABCRM Officers' Resolution on the Sale of Black Forest Camp and Conference Center**

**March 9, 2005**

It was moved, seconded, and carried unanimously that after looking at all of the background work done on the future of Black Forest Camp and Conference Center and examining several options and also receiving the recommendation from the Black Forest Board to sell the camp property, the Officers of the Region recommend to the Region Board in its April 2005 meeting that the Region sell the Black Forest Camp and Conference Center immediately, incorporating the following:

1. Invest the principal.
2. Explore options for Camping and Missions.
3. Provide relevant, comprehensive Youth Ministry.
4. Enable ministry to struggling churches.
5. Plant new churches.
6. Support pastors.
7. Meet the future.

*(Motion made by Yvonne Whisenhunt. Seconded by Richard Schweissing.)*

We as leaders and officers recognize the deep emotional attachment that we have to the camp and pray that God will help us to enter into this discussion with a sense of mutual respect under girded with the desire to understand the mind of Christ.



## **The Department of Administrative Services and New Church Development's Resolution on the Sale of Black Forest Camp and Conference Center (BFCCC)**

**March 10, 2005**

After reviewing a substantial body of information regarding the well being of BFCCC, considering the future ministry focus of the Region, and having received the resolutions of the BFCCC Board of Managers and the Officers of the Region recommending the sale of Black Forest, we resolve to recommend to the ABCRM Board to:

1. List the Black Forest Camp and Conference Center's property for sale at its April board meeting;
2. Ensure a viable, relevant, and ongoing camping plan of action for 2006 onward;
3. Secure the principal realized from the sale of the property;
4. Understand the financial operational implications should the property not immediately sell.

Any sale should secure the continued operation of BFCCC until December 31, 2005.

# The Executive Committee of the Region Board's Resolution on the Sale of Black Forest Camp and Conference Center

March 30, 2005

During its meeting in Denver on Wednesday, the Executive Committee

- considered the needs and focus of the Region's ministry and mission,
- received an update on Black Forest Camp and Conference Center,
- listened to a presentation on the future of camping,
- considered and gave input on the parameters of responsible investment of the principal, and
- participated in a time of questions, answers, and discussion.

The Executive Committee took the following opportunity to respond:

A motion was made and seconded that the Executive Committee recommends to the full Region Board the sale of Black Forest Camp and Conference Center with the conditions set forth in the motion made and carried unanimously by the officers of the Region (*see page 8*).

*(Motion made by Mike Saylor. Seconded by Jim Peters.)*

## Good Stewards in Changing Times

by **Bob Blake**

As I ponder the future of the Black Forest Camp and Conference Center and look at the past few years of history, I am concerned over what I see:

- √ a decline in the numbers of people and churches using the camp,
- √ the financial deficits that have plagued the camp for the past few years,
- √ the ever increasing costs of maintaining and operating the camp and conference center,
- √ a location that is being swallowed up by urban sprawl and a property that has decreased from 1,100 acres to 460 acres,
- √ more competition for the income dollars as young people look for a Christian experience that is different than what can be provided at BFCCC and different from what we may think they should have.

As we understand the emotional and sentimental ties to BFCCC, we must, however, focus on what the young people of today *want* in the way of a Christian camping experience. It is never easy to accept change, but we must realize it is a necessity as we see the ever-changing environment in which our young people find themselves.

We are charged by God to be good stewards. It is becoming more difficult to keep BFCCC financially viable, and looking to the future, it will be even more difficult as costs rise and young people's interests change. We must reassess the ways we challenge and reach our children and youth.

Jesus challenges us in Luke 14:28-30 to develop a plan for any change.

Considerable discussion is taking place regarding the future plans for camping and other Region ministries. These plans will be presented at Area meetings and prior to any vote by the Region Board.

*Bob Blake is the ABCRM Treasurer and a member of FBC/Sterling.*

## Listening to Facts, Figures, Reality, and Possibilities

by **Clara Henderson**

I was first introduced to Black Forest in 1961 by my sister and served for seven years as camp counselor (the term then used for adult leaders). Both of my sons attended camp as young campers. Needless to say, Black Forest has been dear to my heart.

When I first learned consideration was being given to selling Black Forest, I was grieved. Then I listened to the facts, figures, reality, and possibilities. I became convinced we can be better stewards of what God has entrusted to us. I feel we *must* be willing to make changes if we are to have an effective youth ministry.

When I've shared these convictions, I have become aware there are a few people who mistrust Region leadership so much they don't realize the options available to improve our youth ministry. We must believe that when one door closes, another opens. We must let go and let God.

I hope the Area meetings will be well attended by people who are interested in learning the facts and possibilities so this Region may once again be about our Father's business.

*Clara Henderson is a member of FBC/LaJunta*



## Insights from Christian Camp and Conference Association

*(The following letter was sent to Desmond Hoffmeister from Bob Kobielush, Executive Director of CCCA [formerly CCI], the largest Christian or private camping and conference center association in the world. This article should be seen as Bob Kobielush's views as they relate to the challenges faced by denominational camping and should not be interpreted as his endorsement of the sale of Black Forest Camp and Conference Center.)*

To: Desmond Hoffmeister Executive Minister ABCRM (via e-mail)  
From: Bob Kobielush, Director Christian Camp & Conference Association  
Subject: Meeting Recap  
Date: 3/24/05

Desmond and Richard:

It was good to meet with you, Mike, and Ken. I will highlight a few things that we talked about. It will be beyond my time parameters to be too elaborate, but let me give you a few things I believe we talked about.

### With regard to Christian camping in general:

- CCCA consists of approximately 1,100 Christian camps and conferences, with approximately 49% of them owned and operated by a group of churches, e.g. associations/denominations/the like. These 49% are realizing a disproportionate amount of dysfunction to the 51%.
- 74% of the 1,100 members have operating budgets of less than \$750,000.
- Those that exceed \$750,000 and approaching 1.5 million dollars and larger have the operation scale and are doing quite well.
- Those caught between \$250,000-\$750,000 are struggling the most, because they do not have enough scale, and yet have just enough going to have the **illusion of success**.
- Camps that have narrowed to a niche market; e.g., family camps, conference centers for adults, youth, children, etc. are having greater success because their facilities and programs speak very specifically to a particular niche. All programs, operations, and facilities can, therefore, be accommodated appropriately.
- Several years ago camps were operating on about a 3% operating margin, and now the overall average is less than 1%. Successful camps, of course, drive up this average, so those camps "on the bubble" have now worsened their position substantially and are having to take dramatic measures to survive.
- Most camps were born 40-50 years ago and have now fully depreciated their existing facilities and have not funded depreciation. They are left with a **worn-out facility** that no longer competes in the marketplace.
- Many, many camps are operating in an environment of high encroachment through suburban, urban, and even rural development sprawl and sophistication; e.g., five acres next door may now have a \$2 million home occupied by a trial attorney from New York City. This situation does not usually provide for a real good neighborly situation even in rural America. Encroachment upon a camp's property by growing adjacent sophistication is **one of the top major issues facing camps today. Most camps cannot compete or even survive in this type of environment.**

### Denominationally-owed camps:

- For most camps to survive, they must develop usage well beyond their own constituency. They operate far below 50% usage by the primary operating group. When this number gets really low, the viability of the camp and all of its attendant costs to the owning group is called into serious question. There is a very strong movement to becoming a rental facility and, in many cases, accommodating groups not within the scope of their mission and within **allowable IRS provisions** of Not-for-Profit organizations. Therefore, the ministry intent is diluted AND the corporation is beginning to "skate on thin ice" to meet its burden of proof for operating legally within IRS provisions...very serious on both accounts.
- The need for camping experiences, both for youth and adults, has never been greater. If a camp property is liquidated, it is a very good ministry idea to take a portion of that money and develop a new model. Some of the models might be: (1) having an endowed fund from which one can take interest to fund campers scholarships to other first-rate camping facilities for the primary constituency; (2) becoming an operating equity partner with a growing (or perhaps struggling) camping operation.
- In the case of simply setting up an endowment fund, consistent with that, it might be well to show positive intent that a person in the denominational office might have as part of his/her portfolio the development of the camping ministry. Do not delegate it to the operational/financial side of the denominational operating arm. Simply having money in the bank, then, is only one expression, and having a real live person in charge of the portion of the ministry out of the denominational office is often a very positive idea.

There are many more things that could be said, but I feel that with the file folder of information I gave you, along with this, you may have good context for your journey. May God continue to give both of you wisdom, strength, and an unusual amount of insight as you navigate the waters of change in an attempt to provide more effective ministry for the Kingdom.

# A camper's memories and challenge

## Black Forest

by Yvonne Whisenhunt



Black Forest has a very special place in my memory. My family moved to Holyoke, Colorado in the summer of 1946. Dad was the pastor of FBC in Holyoke. I was going to be in the fourth grade that fall.

Mom and Dad were very interested in camping in Colorado. Dad served as camp pastor and Mom as camp counselor for several years. Before Black Forest, I attended Camp Junteen for two years and remember that time as a very special time. I remember going to Black Forest Camp in 1950, the first year camp was held in that location. WOW! What an experience!

We kids carried the food bowls up and down the stairs of the green building without ever spilling a drop. Quite a feat when you were Junior/Junior High kids who were known for our “clumsiness.” Our moms were cooking in the kitchen in the lower level. We hiked, had Bible classes, went to High Vespers and chapel, learned how to do quiet time. During the evenings we had fun times with skits and other programs.

Our kids have all gone to Black Forest for their own camping experiences. And now the grandkids are attending camp there as well. I could go further down memory lane, but you get the picture. Black Forest has been a wonderful influence in our lives. The camping experience itself has greatly influenced my walk with the Lord.

I remember the first time some of the acreage was sold. How angry I was that anyone could or would mess with *my* camp. How dare they? But as time went on, I realized that the reduction did not affect the camping experience at all. In fact, I realized that I didn't even know where those acres were.

I remember when the first modern restroom facility was added. I was sure that “those kids” just wouldn't know what true camping was all about. “Those kids” seem to have had wonderful camping experiences as well. Many improvements have been made since, and I find it has not hurt the camping experience at all.

As an adult I have continued to hold Black Forest in my heart as a very special place in God's creation. I was terribly shocked at the thought of selling Black Forest. I thought of other alternatives: selling part of the acreage (that's been done before and has been a stalling tactic, not a solution), upgrading (where do we get the funds?), accepting more and more outside (businesses, New Age, etc.) camp users (I fear it will start threatening our tax exempt status), and on and on. Then I realized that the possibility of selling has been in the background all along.

I applaud the young men who had the foresight to acquire the Black Forest property. I thank them for over 50 years of great camping experiences for young people in this Region. Their foresight has given ABCRM a resource that we would not have had otherwise.

Since only seven of our ABCRM churches have used the conference center in each of the last three years, the rest of our churches are being “held hostage” in a way. We as a Region are subsidizing the outside users and the churches that do not use the facility are supporting these seven churches that do. Would we be better stewards by selling the camp, investing the money with known investment people, and using the interest to improve how we are serving our youth? Maybe we would even have the resources to support new church starts. In other words, we could do ministry in better ways.

I find it very hard to accept the truth that we *can* do ministry in better ways by serving all the people of the Region with our resources. Emotionally, I do *not* want to sell Black Forest, but *rationally*, I know it is the right thing to do. As a result, I made the motion at the meeting of Region Officers to recommend selling Black Forest. I believe we need to be good stewards of this financial resource God has given us. We need to make plans to protect and grow the principal. We must be very intentional as to how this money is used/protected and how the expenditures are reported.

Back to camping—I realized that I had had a very good experience at Camp Junteen. Black Forest is not the only place that lives can be saved or changed. I believe we should move forward into the current century and let Black Forest continue to serve this Region and constituents in new ways.

*Yvonne Whisenhunt is a past president of the Region and a member of FBC/Longmont*

# Around the Region

## Concerns. . .

**Jeff Lindberg**, Choir Director and Co-Youth Group Leader of American Baptist Church of Ft. Collins, was identified as a perfect match to be a stem cell donor for his brother, Joe, who has Non-Hodgkins Lymphoma. Jeff and his wife, Sandy, spent ten days in the University of Nebraska Medical Center's Lied Transplant Center in March so Jeff could be harvested two times – once for a leukocyte donation, and then for the stem cell transplant. Joe received the transplant from Jeff on Good Friday, March 25th. Please keep Joe in your prayers during the upcoming weeks, and pray that God's hand is at work in this transplant.

On March 2, 2005, **Elmo L. "Ike" Prine** died following a long illness. Ike and wife, Margaret Prine, are long-time members of First Baptist Church in Laramie, Wyoming. Ike taught in

Laramie schools for 33 years. Margaret has been active in American Baptist life since her youth. She served as national president of the American Baptist Churches of the USA in 1984-85.

**Jack Stephenson's mother, Ruth**, passed away on Monday, March 7, 2005. Jack and Lorraine were in Longmont with her. Following a service in Indiana, a memorial will be scheduled in Longmont in April.

## Celebrations. . .

**Ryan Horne** of Cortez, CO has been accepted to participate in the 2005 edition of the Xtreme Team Mission Adventure. He will join 15 other young adults from throughout the United States to experience mission first-hand July 6-August 11. Ryan is part of the team going to the Dominican Republic.

Congratulations to **Barbara Vinzant** (President, ABW Ministries, Wyoming) on the forthcoming marriage of her son on April 29, 2005.

## Opportunities. . .

The American Baptist Churches of Los Angeles is looking for a **principal** for their school, Los Angeles Baptist Junior/Senior High School. Interested persons should contact Dr. Samuel Chetti, Executive Minister, [sschetti@aol.com](mailto:sschetti@aol.com).

The Biennial Registrars would be happy to have some additional **registration volunteers**. If you are able to serve in this capacity, please contact Clara Henderson at 719-384-5650 or Rosalie Williams at 303-922-1831.

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