



GREAT KIDS, GREAT FUTURES & \$4.5 MILLION



Great Kids, Great Futures

A Multi-Million Dollar Campaign 90 Years in the Making



Beginning New

Founded in 1915, Camp Wood YMCA was established to benefit kids from across the state of Kansas – they came by train, wagon, bus and early-model automobiles. World Wars I and II and the Great Depression came and went, but Camp Wood stood.

Post World War II America brought many changes and Camp Wood was not keeping pace. Faced with either closing the camp or giving it away, the directors chose to lease the camp to the Wichita Chapter of the YMCA.

Three decades had passed when budget cuts and a changing mission took the Wichita YMCA in a different direction. They were no longer in a position to provide extended-stay, overnight camping. After nearly 70 years of service to kids, the Wood family vision for youth camping was about to come to an end.

Eager to see the camp survive, Camp Wood alumni and friends, primarily from surrounding rural counties, joined together to assume responsibility for the camp and its operations. They secured a new 501c3 nonprofit status for the camp and set about making the location a meaningful summer destination for all YMCA chapters across the state.

A revolving door of camp directors and staff, plus ever-cautious Board members provided for only minimal success. Aging and inadequate facilities and increasing debt prevented the camp's enrollment from growing – simply put, not enough kids were attending Camp Wood. For the camp to see its 100th anniversary Board members, supporters and staff would have to dream big.

Campaign Name: “Great Kids, Great Futures”

Original Campaign Goal: \$3.4 million

Amount Raised: \$4.5 million

Campaign Objective: To secure funding to build new and renovate facilities at Camp Wood YMCA, a 90-year-old extended-stay, overnight camp in the Flint Hills of east central Kansas. Improvements included a horse pavilion, health center, ropes course, lodge, cabins, shower house, amphitheater, new sewer system and more.

Campaign Highlights:

- Recruited a 16-member Campaign Leadership Committee that represents 11 communities from across the state
- Received and met a \$575,000 challenge grant from the J.E. and L.E. Mabee Foundation

Dreaming Big

Camp Wood then experienced two significant successes — several hundred acres were added to the original site and a new water system was installed. The now 640-acre camp site offered the opportunity for greater programming and opened the door for more children to attend camp.

“We were beginning to understand that fundraising was the key to solving our problems,” said Camp Wood YMCA Executive Director Ken Wold.

There was an acute understanding for the need to “rebuild” the camp, but years of frustration, caution and a fear of fundraising was holding volunteer leadership back.

“We believed in the camp and what it had to offer to kids,” said Campaign Co-Chair Paul DeBauge. “Many of us had been Camp Wood campers during our youth and we knew there was value in this place being available to kids across Kansas and Missouri.”

Board members agreed that building “updated” facilities was a necessity. A master site plan was developed. It included a shower house, horse pavilion, health center, sewer system, ropes course, lodge, cabins and more. Hartsook Companies — a national fund-raising consulting firm — was retained to conduct a campaign assessment. They would later serve as campaign counsel.



“Hartsook re-affirmed that providing a traditional camping experience was what our donors and supporters wanted as a result of this campaign,” said Wold.

Some wondered if Camp Wood would become a camp for the 21st century — a computer or science camp where I-Pods and radios were allowed. The Board and volunteer leadership chose to restore the camp but maintain its traditional mission to provide a place where outdoor activities — swimming, horse riding, boating, hiking, archery and more — would be the primary focus.

Once the vision for Camp Wood was resolved, the organization had to address the idea of raising money, accept the thought of a million dollar campaign and embrace the concept of major gift solicitation.

Recalls Campaign Co-Chair Roger Strickland, “Hartsook Companies President Robert Swanson, our consultant throughout the assessment and integrated campaign, said to us, ‘There are many people you have yet to meet that will help you raise millions of dollars.’ I was surprised by that comment at the time, but it gave us one more reason to do a campaign and it proved to be true.”

Homework for Camp Wood

“You’ve never met a more dedicated group of people than the staff and volunteer leaders of Camp Wood YMCA,” said Swanson. “They were apprehensive about a capital campaign — knowing that millions of dollars needed to be raised — but their love and passion for the camp and the kids was sincere.”

Three important dynamics gave the organization confidence to move forward:

- The campaign assessment confirmed their belief that rebuilding a “traditional camp” was important
- A generous family stepped forward with a leadership gift to launch the quiet phase of the campaign
- The staff and leadership were comfortable with Hartsook Companies

Said Wold, “We did our homework — site development, campaign assessment, interviews and surveys had all been completed and a campaign goal of \$3.4 million was set. It was now time to build the framework for the campaign and raise the money.”



“Ken Wold’s time as executive director was an important factor to getting this campaign off the ground,” said Swanson. “After a history of executive directors revolving in and out, Ken’s tenure and professional YMCA background provided a strong reason for volunteer leaders to say ‘yes’ to a campaign.”

The Campaign Begins

“Robert led me through the process of approaching a local family for a leadership gift,” said Wold. “A father and one of his daughters sat in the room as I asked for the gift. This solicitation came only after we had solicited and secured gifts from every Board member.”

The leadership gift was received in the back isle of a local grocery store a week later and the campaign was off to a fast start.

“That gift and the cash flow gift were the beginning of something very special,” said Jerry Karr, Campaign Leadership Committee member. “The people closest to the organization had stepped up in such meaningful ways. And then to have a local family make the leadership gift, gave everyone a sense that the new vision was on target and the camp was in line to ask for help in support of the kids.”

During the campaign’s quiet period a variety of building blocks were put in place.

- **A meaningful theme was developed and articulated for the campaign — “Great Kids, Great Futures.”** Said Wold, “We believe every kid is great and, given a chance to grow up with good values and the opportunity to experience new things, they can have great futures for themselves and their families.”
- **A 16-member Campaign Leadership Committee, representing 11 communities from across the state, was recruited.** Citizens from Kansas City to Salina and from Topeka to Wichita had benefited from this camp for years. “With less than 3,500



people in the county, we had to draw the other 2.7 million Kansans into the mix,” said DeBauge. “We needed the big metropolitan communities and their dollars involved. Positioning the campaign as a statewide project proved to be a wise strategy.”

- **Staff was restructured.** A second program director was added, allowing Wold more time to focus on the campaign and to serve as the campaign’s public face.
- **The *First Monday* strategy was implemented to communicate with prospects and donors.** Each month more than 800 individuals received a two-page, specialized memorandum. “During the first 18 months of the campaign we did not talk about the campaign in our *First Monday* memo,” said Wold. “We were building up to a climactic announcement — quietly cultivating them the entire time.”

The campaign went public once the leadership was able to announce that a \$575,000 challenge grant had been received from the J.E. and L.E. Mabee Foundation in Tulsa, Okla. The gift was announced along with the 12-month deadline for securing the final \$1.1 million in gifts and pledges needed to reach the \$3.4 million goal.

The challenge grant was met and 30 months into the 36-month campaign gifts totaling \$3.5 million had been secured. This did not include another \$350,000 secured through the organization’s annual fund program.

“I’m told we learned a familiar lesson,” said Carol Ritchie, Campaign Leadership Committee member. “It’s not about the money, it’s about the kids and the camp. If we could get prospective donors to tour the camp and see it firsthand, most of them would offer support at some level.”

“I’ve been helping send kids to Camp Wood for more than a decade,” said Bruce Huffman, Campaign Leadership Committee member. “This campaign will allow more kids, more opportunities to go to camp — that’s important to me.”

The Future After 90 Years

The campaign opened, and continues to open, the eyes of volunteer leadership, donors and staff to the multitude of possibilities for Camp Wood.

“This part of the state is rural and multi-million dollar campaigns are not common — particularly in Chase County,” said Jerry Karr, farmer and former State Senator. “The horse pavilion, which was the lead project, was realized with a lot of local donations and the vision of a local family who made the leadership gift. It served to inspire and motivate people who had seldom, if ever, thought about philanthropy.”

Huffman believes the campaign also served to educate and motivate many throughout the state of Kansas and the region. “I believe a lot of people thought of us as this sleepy, simple camping place. They really didn’t know who we were and what we had to offer. Many more people know about us today than did three years ago.”

Wold echoed Huffman’s observation. “We thought about \$2.5 million, we moved past \$3.4 million, crossed the \$4 million mark and now are looking to surpass \$4.5 million. With our message focused on the kids we serve, we had a good response from almost everyone. Helping kids build character through outdoor activities motivated donors to be involved.”

Wold summed up the spirit and tone of Camp Wood’s new vision for itself. “We need to be raising gifts year ‘round and asking more people to constantly join us as supporters of this camp. We have decided to push this campaign past the \$5 million mark. The fundraising infrastructure is in place, it makes no sense to stop, take it apart and try to get it up and running again in another two or three years. We are going to make fundraising an institutional value for this organization. We are taking Camp Wood’s future into our own hands.”

“Camp Wood YMCA has celebrated its 90th anniversary,” said Merlin Dresher, former Board President and Campaign Leadership Committee member. “I am confident this camp will be serving the kids of Kansas and the Midwest for another 90 years. Its mission today is as valid as it was 90 years ago when the governor of Kansas cut the ribbon and declared Camp Wood open for business.”

About the Consultant – Robert G. Swanson, President, Hartsook Companies, has helped nonprofit organizations in higher education, youth services, social services, the arts, museums and healthcare raise funds as they seek to expand and improve services for their clients. In his more than 19 years as a fund-raising professional, Robert has helped clients secure more than \$250 million in gifts and grants. Robert can be reached at robert@hartsookcompanies.com.

About Hartsook Companies, Inc. – Hartsook Companies, Inc., has served nonprofits nationwide with capital, endowment and annual campaigns; leadership support; board training; marketing and more since 1987. The firm has conducted more than 1,700 campaigns ranging from \$500,000 to more than \$1 billion. The web site: www.hartsookcompanies.com.

