

OLD AGE: A NEW FRONTIER FOR CAMPING

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Have you thought of inviting oldsters as well as youngsters to use your camping facilities? There are 12 million people ages 65 years and over in the United States (which by 1980 will grow upwards of 26 million) who are not limited by school sessions nor lack of time, to enjoy everything you have to offer in your camp. Many of this ever growing population of prospective campers are just as eager to partake of camping opportunities.

As a director, you should be interested in having camping sessions for the senior adult in order to make the best all year around use of your camp facilities. The physical plant is always available and certainly continual use of it will decrease the unit overhead cost. Our senior citizens have had little opportunity for group living or for the enjoyment of pleasures and skills of their youth, such as: winter ice fishing and taffy pulls; early bass fishing; fall hunting; gardening or farming on a small scale; collecting flowers, fall leaves, shells; and they too like swimming, boating, skating and even skiing. You do have to adapt the interests to the debilities of some of the oldsters but you may be amazed at how easily this is accomplished and equally astonished at the ease which their old skills return and become polished with a little encouragement on your part.

Our senior citizens have been deprived, all too long, of the privilege of doing something for someone else. In some cases they have felt useless because they were looked upon as old and slow, and in others they were handicapped because of lack of money to buy materials. On the other hand, the oldsters are excellent teachers because they are methodical, slow, and have a great deal of patience; they receive a tremendous enjoyment from teaching others their knowledge of land, animals, birds, and their manual

JUN 1 1953

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skills. Give the oldsters the opportunity of joining your youngsters at camp and utilize their talents in teaching them how to make bird houses; repair the boat dock; fix the joints on the rustic chairs; sew curtains after stenciling leaves for the designs; painting wild flowers and making clay models of items of camp interest. You may even encourage them to cook, as many of the oldsters (both male and female) have been deprived of that creative ability because they have been forced to live alone without adequate cooking facilities, with relatives, or in boarding homes where they never have the opportunity to cook according to the recipes they brought so carefully from the 'old world'. The interest on the part of the senior adult may voluntarily decrease the need for an extensive camp staff if you but give them the opportunity to be useful. Certainly, in view of the prospect of the loss of many staff members to the armed forces or defense industries, this important resource should be utilized.

The greatest single problem of old age is lonesomeness and the feeling that one has no role to play in society. Leisure time has increased but only a positive use of this leisure will control the conditions of idleness, loneliness and physical and mental deterioration on the part of the older person. Camping, to the oldster, facilitates opportunities for bringing happiness, richness in living, mental stimulation and fun.

Experience has demonstrated that camping not only improves the mental health of the older adult but also decreases many of his physical complaints; and since program content is determined by camp policy, available facilities, the wishes of the campers and the ingenuity of the camp staff, you need not deter from inviting them because of a latent fear of the 'frailty of the aged'. One eighty year old man stated he could not remember when he had had so much fun and an eighty-four year old woman forgot her

medical clinic appointments (and incidentally her ailments) because she had gained new friends and interests after a camping period. The splendid public relations resulting from the Oldsters' experiences in participating in camping can be of enormous value because they are very anxious to have others join them in their fun and interests.

Parents have sent their children to camps and camping has focused on youth. These same parents may be only too happy to have the same recreational opportunities for their own parents. Others, living in crowded quarters would deeply appreciate having Granddad have a little vacation at your camp which would give them the longed for opportunity to paint or remodel the home during his absence. Remember, the population is growing older fast; so rapidly in fact, that future camps may in some instances cater exclusively to the wants of the senior adult.

Old age now demands its share in camping. Are you, as a Director, willing to accept the challenge of pioneering on this new frontier?

Written for the CAMPING MAGAZINE,  
the official publication of the  
American Camping Association.