

From Seth Frank '48 & '49 Sun, Nov 9, 2014 at 4:12 PM EST

Dear Board members and All devoted members of the CRS Community,

I am writing now with the hope -- however possibly quixotic -- that the Board is genuinely interested in taking into account, in a meaningful way which may translate into constructive action, and not merely with lip service and poorly disguised irritation, the outpouring of comments which have come from deeply concerned and committed Alums who believe they were not adequately consulted regarding the Board's recent decisions regarding fundamental matters affecting CRS -- most fundamentally, what appears more and more to be a determined and intractable decision to close one or both of the Dutchess County campsites and move to Pennsylvania -- which deeply affect the Alums in their past, present and future relations to CRS and LAJF.

I want to put on the record, at the outset, that however much I and others may disagree with the Board's decisions and the process by which they have been reached and communicated, an immeasurable debt of gratitude is owed to each and every member of the Board who has shouldered an often thankless and an always uncompensated responsibility in trying to do what's good and what's right for CRS and LAJF.

I also want to put on the record that the Alums, who also serve although they oftentimes merely stand and wait, are also owed a debt of gratitude for examining their consciences and coming forward with their views in the same spirit of trying to do what's good and what's right for CRS and LAJF.

Let us, as we go forward, within whichever forum, treat one another with honesty and respect -- respect for truth (which a revered law professor of mine -- another Freddie -- Friedrich Kessler used to say is more important than friendship) and with friendship, which is the cement which will bind our search for truth.

And now, let's look at some facts:

The Board has recently posted on the LAJF website some figures from the 990 forms which it files annually -- as required by law -- with the Internal Revenue Service. Among other things, they show the following comparisons in annual costs between 2010 and 2013:

The cost of two camp seasons at the two campsites has remained fairly constant, increasing from \$974,557 to \$1,056,043.

The cost of fundraising has risen somewhat from \$113,857 to \$140,096.

On the other hand, the cost of alumni affairs has almost doubled from \$131,331 to \$244,676.

And the cost of management and administration has well more than doubled from \$130,435 to \$309,838.

The cost of occupancy was not disclosed, but I believe in the year ended 9/30/10 it was \$127,824, compared to \$21,270 in the year ended 3/31/08, before the office was moved to New York City.

In 2013 the contributions totaled \$555,335 and 5.5% of the endowment was \$561,346.

One may slice and dice these figures in a variety of ways. What comes to my mind is that the 2013 contributions and 5.5% of the endowment together exceed the 2013 cost of the CRS seasons at both campsites. And either of those two figures combined with the conditional offer of \$300,000 from the Lurcy Trust and me and \$200,000 from Nita and Rick Luis would cover or exceed the 2013 cost of the CRS seasons at both campsites, while leaving the other of those figures (contributions or endowment 5.5%) to cover other LAJF expenses --even the swollen 2013 combined alumni affairs/management and administration, before what should be substantial cost cutting in those two categories. (In that connection, it does not afford comfort or persuasion to point to an amount or percentage by which the budget was, is or may be reduced. That only impugns the prudence, rationality and reality of the budget.)

The plain and simple truth is: It's not the cost of operating the camps in Dutchess County that is threatening the financial viability of LAJF -- it's the out of control escalating costs of alumni affairs and management and administration.

Nita and Rick Luis: Are you moved by the above to reconsider your unwillingness to earmark a portion of your announced gift to CRS 2015 season operations?

Before attempting to fold the Dutchess County tents and move them to Pennsylvania, let me offer a few other observations:

In recent years, the campers at both camps -- in a highly commendable gesture that speaks more heart and truth than I can express -- on departing from Camp have donated from their candy money and personal allowance to LAJF, virtually unanimously. (I believe I matched their contributions in their first year because I was so moved.) This may seem like little money.

But it's not. It's big money because it bespeaks their big gratitude and devotion for an experience and a place that were forevermore to be in their hearts and minds -- and a material connection to LAJF, hopefully for life. You may think my reaction excessive. But a couple of things are clear: They were not contributing from their candy money so future campers could buy Hershey bars in Pennsylvania. And to take their contributions -- which became part of the LAJF treasure chest -- and use them to close the Dutchess County camps and relocate them to Pennsylvania would be a callous act

of betrayal, bordering on the morally, if not legally fraudulent. It threatens to sever the tender connection they made as trusting adolescents.

The LAJF website, in speaking of Pennsylvania, states: "Additionally, the required counselor staffing ratios [in Pennsylvania] are significantly lower and so fewer staff would be required." My questions are: (1) echoing my previous concern: How can this not adversely impact the health and safety of the Campers? and (2) How can this not adversely impact the extent and quality of the program? Reduced counselor staff is bound to have a material adverse effect, possibly with consequences that cannot be imagined and might be rueful, if they should occur. And it is trying to save money in the wrong way, in the wrong category of expense. Better a cheaper office, an online Sundial and reduced travel expense out of the LAJF pocket than fewer counselors. Is it mature and enlightened thinking to regard the New York State counselor staffing ratio as a liability to be avoided, rather than an asset to be applauded and communicated to parents as a protection for their children? Shouldn't our objective be to give our Campers not the cheapest, but the safest and best experience we can?

Voices as rational, respected and diverse as Rick Haynes and Theodora Konetsovskaya, among others, have deplored such a move. They have rightly concluded that it would result in an empty shell, totally unrecognizable as the CRS all of us have known and loved. No less a long and loyal CRS participant and observer as Rick Richter -- who is not given to hyperbole -- has stated recently that "generally the young Red Hook campers are shocked and stunned and have the feeling that something that had become a beloved part of their lives is suddenly and unexpectedly disappearing forever." (My apologies to the aforementioned for citing and quoting them without prior permission.)

The extent and depth of the Alum alienation and disaffection that would result is beyond my ability to calculate. More important is that it be properly understood by the Board. To fail to do so, may well be to fracture the entire body of Alums and the CRS Community irreparably. Were I on the Board -- as once I was -- I would not support such a calamitous course.

I am not trying to fire a shot across the bow of the Board. Rather I am seeking, even imploring, the Board to pause and redirect its efforts, in a cooperative dialogue leading to constructive consensual action that will provide a full 2015 Dutchess County camp season at one or both campsites, with ample time to plan and provide for the season in a customary way and will remove -- for good and for the good of all -- the explosively divisive threat of a relocation from the heritage campsites.

Thanksgiving will soon be here. Let us pray -- each in his or her own way -- that we will have something good to celebrate regarding CRS.

Sincerely,

Seth Frank '48 & '49