

# Local contractors make it happen!

The story of great people helping thousands of Boys and Girls Club kids at Camp Smitty

**KAREN SECORD** – The Ottawa Construction News Special Feature

Tom Patrick doesn't mince words.

Camp Smitty exists today—modern, well-maintained and funded, revenue-producing and community-building—because of the generosity of Ottawa's construction industry.

In fact, the Boys and Girls Club camp was in pretty rough shape and in danger of closing before the start of the new millennium. Its facilities were mostly a mish-mash of haphazardly constructed “camp-style” structures from the 1930's to 1960's, lacking solid foundations, flush toilets and even minimal insulation.

As Camp Director, former Police Youth Centre Director and one-time camp participant the very thought of having to discontinue such an historic Boys and Girls Club program both saddened and motivated Patrick.

“Camp Smitty is a story of great people,” says Patrick, who met his wife there and has sent his children there. “Once they see camp in session they want to do more. Hearing the stories is one thing but seeing them unfold is something else.”

Located on 28 acres at the edge of Mink Lake in the Ottawa Valley, it was founded as Camp Minwassin in 1924 and renamed in 2001 to recognize the contribution CTV sportscaster Brian “Smitty” Smith had made to the community before being killed in 1995. Smith, a former NHL player, attended Camp Minwassin as a young teenager.

Today, four summer camp sessions each accommodate 100 children aged eight to 15 years old. On average 70 percent receive significant financial support. Many attend despite having experienced very traumatic life situations. Children's Aid refers about 50 kids a year.

In 2006 the Ottawa Senator's Alumni, with Brad Marsh's enthusiastic support, committed to raising \$500,000 for the camp. To date they have raised \$300,000, which has been used to build two new washroom blocks and a senior staff cabin, with more to come.

## The construction community steps up

To address the need for upgraded facilities at Camp Smitty a committed and effective Camp Facility Committee was formed. Current members include Patrick, Boys and Girls Club Building Coordinator Tony Bond and Executive Director Scott Bradford, Amsted Construction's Steve Barkhouse, and Bruce Sandor, owner of South Woodworking and Construction.

“The impact of the contributions from our construction volunteers, donors and supporters has been incredible. It significantly upgrades the facilities at Camp Smitty and, as importantly, it motivates our staff team and energizes the campers; everyone gets the clear message that the construction community truly cares about enhancing the quality of life for deserving children,” says Patrick emphatically.

Today, thanks to the generous support of businesses such as Kealey and Tack-abberry Log Homes, South Woodworking and Construction, Amsted Design Build and Restore-All Corporation, Camp Smitty is equipped with camper cabins for boys and girls, a state-of-the-art dining hall with a majestic electric fireplace, an indoor recreation hall (renovated original dining hall), a waterfront recreation area, and a soon to be completed log home.

“Our kitchen facility was recently put into operation and provides a great place to have meals and host activities like award nights, quizzes, talent shows and conferences,” explains Patrick. “We have installed a new well that will supply all the drinking water and showering water needs for the camp. We now have new canoes, a rescue launch and swimming equipment for our campers to enjoy when at camp.”

## The enthusiastic Amsted Construction team

One weekend each fall for nearly 10 years Amsted/Restore-All has been bringing a team of 50 to 70 employees and their families to complete on-site projects at Camp Smitty.

Company partner Fred Barkhouse started the tradition with the construction of the dining hall and kitchen. Over the years Amsted/Restore-All's contribution has grown to include two “tree houses,” a new maintenance shed with electricity, roofs and porches on the camper cabins, and renovations to the arts and crafts room.

“The tree houses are 15 feet high and are a beautiful alternative to sleeping in a tent,” explains Patrick. “We do the meals for them and they do a full week-end of volunteering. If the projects are not completed they will come back the following weekend. To finish the tree houses they came back the next two weekends to get them done.”



## Camp Smitty

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Amsted/Restore-All provides design/build, project management and construction services to the residential sectors. They also own insurance restoration specialists and Restore-All Roofing, Windows & Doors.

Decked out in matching t-shirts the Amsted/Restore-All group of three to 70 year olds are given tasks suited to their skill level, by a management team that begins planning for the weekend one year in advance.

“This is a team building exercise for

Amsted/Restore-All,” says Steve Barkhouse. “We work all year to prepare. We pick a project, get the material and equipment, walk the site, pick the tasks and do the staging. We want to make sure that everyone who comes up is involved in the project.”

For Steve Barkhouse, his father Fed and business partner Kirk Haw, Camp Smitty is a special place.

“I would suggest that Camp Smitty is now one of the premiere camps in Canada,” says Steve proudly. “As a father it is important to me that we participate in something like this together and that we work hard together. I want my children to give back to the community because they want to not because I told them to. When we all

work together at Camp Smitty we can see the results of our hard labour and we feel like we have contributed and that is important.

“Carpenters are not known to be philanthropists,” continues Steve “but we have a skill that is in huge demand so we can stretch the donations for them by helping out.”

### The singing carpenter

Bruce Sandor, owner of South Woodworking and Construction has a five year plan for the continued rejuvenation of Camp Smitty’s facilities. But he has been volunteering his time and expertise far longer than that.

“No kid is going to miss out on going to camp because their parents can’t afford it,” says the Smiths Falls resident passionately.

Sandor clearly believes that the work he and others like him are doing to assist the Boys and Girls Club really makes a difference in the lives of the children and families it serves. He likes to visit Camp Smitty in the summer just to see the children smiling and having a good time. He thinks nothing of putting his paying work on hold to build or fix something for the camp when an urgent need arises.

However, what the carpenter is most proud of is the dedication shown by his fellow “barbershop” style singers in the Capital City Chorus. For the past 10 years a group of about 80 men have assembled at Camp Smitty for a weekend of hard work with huge rewards.

“Bruce Sandor is a big guy with a heart of gold,” says Patrick. “When he gets those guys working on a project he works them hard and they respond. They built four new camper cabins in a single weekend.”

The Boys and Girls Club of Ottawa estimates that the value of the renovations performed by the Capital City Chorus at Camp Smitty over the past five years is \$100,000.

“The Capital City Chorus guys are dedicated. They feel guilty if they are not contributing,” explains Sandor. “Upgrades like insulation have made Camp Smitty a 12-month operation which means that it can generate income from rentals and we are really pleased to have been part of that.”

### Kealey and Tackaberry Log Homes build new Point Cabin

Currently, the excitement at Camp Smitty is focused on the construction of a new 1,200 sq. ft. log home designed to replace the old Point Cabin. Located near the family beach area with a spectacular view across Mink Lake, the cabin had seen several incarnations throughout the years. At times it was used as the camp director’s accommodation and at others housed volunteers or special guests.

Paul Kealey and Adam Tackaberry, owners of Kealey & Tackaberry Log Homes, are building the one and a half story, three bedroom house at cost. And with the support of many other construc-

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Congratulations to the Boys and Girls Club of Ottawa and the whole team working on the Camp Smitty project.

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The Boys and Girls Club of Ottawa would like to extend its warmest regards and deep appreciation to all the companies and individuals who have given so freely of their time, energy, and finances to help rejuvenate Camp Smitty.

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# Camp Smitty

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tion partners (see sidebar) the build is just another example of the amazing commitment of the industry to the children of East-ern Ontario.

“We believe any successful business needs to have a relationship with their community and this starts with giving back to the community,” says Kealey. “We always try to support local events and charities when we are able to so we literally jumped at the opportunity to be directly involved with this one since it’s ‘right up our alley’.”

Logs for the house were sourced directly from the property commencing in November 2010 and construction began in January 2011. Foy & Son Logging and Excavation Co. left the heavy equipment at home and used horses to harvest two species of trees—white cedar for the walls and red pine for the second floor and roof systems. The style of construction is *piece-en-piece*, which uses a combination of horizontal logs and vertical posts. This was the preferred style as the white cedar typically has too much ‘taper’ to be used in lengths longer than 20 feet.

“The idea of the project stems from the

nature of our company existence and expertise - energy efficient home building using natural materials, having a low carbon footprint,” explains Kealey. “It doesn’t get more future-friendly than this one. The logs were not only taken from the property, they were horse logged as well.

“Log homes are a symbol of us as Canadians, especially here in the Ottawa Valley, one of the ‘lumber capitals of the world for the past 150 plus years,” continues Kealey. “Importantly, Forestry Canada’s harvesting rules and regulations are such that they will prevent this valuable resource from ever depleting. In a nutshell, Canada has 12 per cent of the world’s forest cover, 90 per cent is crown owned and no more than one-quarter of one per cent is allowed to be harvested each year. The renewable nature of wood along with its structural and insulative qualities, make it one of the most available construction materials. As a result, a log home is a true preservation of nature as the structure is ‘visible’ - “Preserving the past, protecting the future” as we like to say.”

Rustic and functional, the cabin’s footprint is 28’x32’. It features a covered porch on three sides and an open concept interior. Completion, notes Patrick, will depend on the availability of volunteers and donations

of furniture.

However, once finished, rentals of the new Point Log Cabin will help generate revenue for future camp renovations and additions. The money raised by having an attractive facility for off-season corporate events, family reunions etc. will also be used to give more children the opportunity to attend camp.

Camp Smitty is all about the kids. And Ottawa’s construction industry is doing its part to make sure that no child who wants to go to camp is denied the opportunity.



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