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## Finding Minnesota: Heading North To Summer Camp



Reporting  
[Mike Binkley](#)

NISSWA, Minn. (WCCO) — Why would a city kid from New York or a teenager from Europe travel all the way to Minnesota in the summer? The answer can be found in the Brainerd Lakes Area, where Camp Lincoln for boys and Camp Lake Hubert for girls are now celebrating their 100th anniversary.

In the past century, the two camps near Nisswa have welcomed more than 30,000 kids from nearly every state and 13 countries.

The camps are set on 800 acres of wooded trails and fields, about as far removed from the congestion and pollution of the big city that a child could find.

Twelve-year-old Claire Fry of San Francisco flew in for her third straight summer at Camp Lake Hubert.

"When I got on the bus from the airplane," she said. "I was so excited to see my friends in various seats and I was just like, 'Yes, they're here!'"

Claire happens to be the granddaughter of news anchor Tom Brokaw. Her grandmother and her mother both attended Camp Lake Hubert when they were girls. That's quite common at both camps to have second- and third-generation campers whose parents and grandparents were there before them.

It all started in 1909, when William Blake of Blake School in Hopkins established a camp up north to reward kids who did well in class.

It was known as Blake Camp for Boys. One of those boys, Brownie Cote, was so inspired he ended up buying the place as a young man in the 20s. And it's been in his family ever since.

"He was so impressed with the benefits and the impact of bringing kids together in a north woods setting, in a traditional values-centered environment with great staff, great leadership that he said 'Wow, this is a powerful experience,'" recalled Brownie's son Sam Cote.

Sam and his siblings grew up around their father's summer camp. Sam joined the staff in the 1960s and he's been running things since the 1980s -- sticking just to the basics.

"No texting, no cell phones, no iPods," he said. "It's all just learning those life skills. How do you live and work together with other people."

The camp won't be leaving the Cote family anytime soon. Sam's son, Ruggs, who also grew up around Camp Lincoln, is now the director.

"A lot of my friends and former cabin mates and my former staff, are now sending their kids back," he says. "And so for me to be able to give them the same experience that I grew up with, that is something that is just that's very unique."

It's a cycle that's repeated itself time and again over the decades, with families from around the world.

Including the family that runs the place. Ruggs Cotes' own children are now starting to enjoy the camps.

The two camps offer 2-week sessions and 4-week sessions, at roughly \$1,000 a week. Many alumni have donated scholarship money, which the Cote family matches.

This Labor Day weekend many of those alumni will return for a big 100th Anniversary Celebration at the camps.



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