

# CLOSE TO HOME

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SECTION C

## Turning boys into men

Camp Agawam in Raymond celebrates 90 years of summer tutelage.

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**F**or 90 years, Camp Agawam has offered summer-long youth camps that are intended to turn boys into men. The all-boy camp was founded by the late Appleton Mason in 1919.

A New York football coach and physical education teacher, Ap, known on campus as "The Governor," annually packed up his family and headed to Crescent Lake in Raymond to offer summer recreation opportunities for generations of boys, ages 8 to 15.

Ap was succeeded as camp director by sons Appleton Mason Jr. from 1939-1956 and Dave Mason from 1957 to 1985.

The Mason men were known for their physical prowess, natural affability, quiet strength and guiding presence.

Hiking, fishing, swimming, sailing, archery and sports all part of Agawam's programs. But a hallmark of the camp is its focus on leadership and character building that is developed through daily interaction with mentors and peers.

"My father knew the value of leadership," said Dave, 92, of Fryeburg. "It was vital to the running of the operation and we developed a wonderful program where boys would meet with their counselors each week to work on personality traits and communication skills."

Campers who modeled good citizenship earned points as a measure of their success and were recognized at a weekly campfire ceremony.

In 1971, Dave founded the Maine Idea program that annually sponsors 100 or more Maine boys for a one-week, advance-season camp experience at Agawam. Those boys are recommended for the program by education officials or clergy as outstanding students who may not otherwise be able to afford camping tuition.

At the end of the week, six of those campers are invited to return to Agawam for a full season on scholar-



Courtesy Erik Calhoun

The three most recent directors of Camp Agawam, gathered at the 90th anniversary reunion, are Dave Mason, Erik Calhoun and Garth Nelson.

ship. In 2005, the program, which has hosted more than 2,600 boys, received the American Camping Association's Eleanor P. Eells Award for Program Excellence. Financing of the scholarships comes from fundraisers such as an annual August golf marathon, which this year raised \$52,000.

Dave retired in 1985, selling the complex to the (then) newly formed, non-profit Agawam Council for a fraction of the property's value. He and wife Peg Mason continue to lend support, attending all of the council meetings and fundraisers to stay current on the programs progress.

Carrying on the traditions and affiliations formed at camp are a big deal for alumni members.

"Agawam is such a formative place for development," said alum Erik Calhoun, the camp's newest director, who succeeded Garth Nelson in 2008. "My career in education stemmed directly from working here."

Calhoun's father was a camper and counselor at Agawam, and he recalled attending reunions there in the 1970s. Calhoun first attended as a camper in 1981, at age 11, and met his lifelong best friend John Clark there that first day.

Little has changed in the way those bonds are formed. Then, as now, boys arrive at the camp for a seven-week



Shown at the recent 90th anniversary celebration of Camp Agawam in Raymond are Dave Mason and his wife Peg. Dave is a son of Agawam founder Appleton Mason.

stay and are involved in activities designed to build a sense of community and mutual respect.

Modern forms of communication, such as cell phones, computers and electronic devices, are checked at the door. Here, the only things twittering are the birds and instant messaging is done face to face.

"Computers can connect you to the world in some ways but disconnect you in others," said Calhoun. "Sharing a sense of community with others here is an important element. Those trappings or distractions can only hinder that."

Frank Anthony, 52, a program director, Maine Idea volunteer and past council president has also progressed through the ranks from camper to leader. He began at the camp in 1968 at age 12 and recalled the night in July of 1969 when Dave woke the entire camp to view the Apollo 11 moon landing on the dining hall's tiny black and white television set, following with a talk on how that event would change the world.

Anthony noted that the Masons contributed many such defining moments that positively influenced him.

"Dave and Peg Mason were a huge presence at camp and featured prominently in the development of many generations of the boys and their families who came here. They focused on leadership and social competence, helping boys be confident in their relationships and developing character goals. Those are still the centerpieces of our programs."

The camp also influenced young men who came in as staffers.

"I'm proof positive that it's never too late to grow up," said Bob Dimont, a past Agawam Council president and fundraising director for the Maine Idea program. "My first impression of Dave was quite impactful. He was a towering man of 6 foot 4 inches who spoke so softly and had a level of character that drew you to him instantly."

Dimont said he was hired in 1974, at age 18.

"I had no idea that camps existed, where the emphasis was on cultivating a positive, caring environment, where character goals were stressed more than the winning of games," Dimont said. "The camp also taught us about environmental stewardship and caring for the community around us. I've been volunteering for the last 15 summers largely because of what it did for my own character development."

In August, about 200 alumni, representing an equal mix of traditional Agawam and Maine Idea programs, attended the 90th Anniversary celebration at the campground. They did so to reminisce and reconnect as much as to honor Dave and Peg.

"A camp is only as good as its leadership and quality leaders attract quality people," said Dimont. "And that is the legacy of the Mason family."

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