



Charles L. Sommers Alumni Association, Inc.

# REFLECTIONS



Supporting the mission and programs of Northern Tier National High Adventure.

WINTER 2018 - SPRING 2019 EDITION



## Join us "Up North" for our reunion this August!

By Mike Goodwin and Ryan Sievert

The longer I am away from the Northwoods, the more I realize it's not a place we visit once in a while. It becomes a part of us: our hearts and our blood. It's a part of our life force. The farther away we get from it, the more our hearts long for the morning mist and loon calls. Longing to hear the breeze flowing through the pine boughs. The soft, distant rustling of a pine marten early in the morning.

There are others who have that same pining feeling for this place. Northern Tier has given us all that longing. The need to feel the canoe glide across the water has come again. It's time to reunite yourself with the Northwoods, and with the congregation who share your respect and reverence for this land.

**The reunion will be from Friday, August 23rd through Sunday, August 25th.** We hope you and your family will join us. We can all share our stories, lives, and peace with others who feel what we feel.

We're currently planning on a bonfire along with other activities on base. A picnic lunch in town, dinner at the Sandy Bridges Program Center, and a banquet

### Register today!

#### 2019 Reunion Rendezvous

Friday, August 23rd - Sunday, August 25th, 2019

Register online at [reunion.holry.org](http://reunion.holry.org)

Register by June 19th for the early bird discount.  
Registration closes August 1st.

with a silent auction at Amici's Event Center on Saturday evening.

We look forward to seeing some old, familiar faces, and even some new ones come August. It's been three years since the last reunion. Rendezvous to celebrate the completion of Northern Tier's 97th season, as we approach the 100th anniversary.

**Register for the reunion online by visiting [reunion.holry.org](http://reunion.holry.org).**

We encourage you to register in advance not only to save but to allow us to create the best reunion experience for you. *Red-eye!*





## Wildfires close Philmont Scout Ranch, sending crews and staff to Northern Tier

By Leslie Thibodeaux

In the summer of 2018, Philmont Scout Ranch closed before participant crews could arrive due to the Ute Park fire. This difficult decision to close resulted in the cancellation of treks for over 20,000 participants. Some of these displaced crews instead headed to Northern Tier.

To support those crews displaced from their programs, Northern Tier sent a charter bus to Philmont to pick up 46 seasonal staff. These staff members headed up north to Northern Tier to help with taking out crews and supporting base operations.

After a 24-hour trip on the bus, the staff arrived at Northern Tier to a welcome by the current staff. The staff got to take a quick paddle that evening to general manager John Van Dreese's house where they participated in a cookout. They also had the first chance to meet and talk with the Northern Tier staff.

The next day they immediately turned around and began a quick orientation and training. This is so we could get them on a "swamper" and trained as quickly as possible. Wow! It was fast and fun, but what a ride. The Philmont staff did a great job, handing a quick turnaround and immediately taking out crews.

The addition of staff enabled Northern Tier to accommodate about thirty of the crews displaced by

the fires at Philmont. While all staff arrived on a charter bus, we sent them back in small batches via plane or train. Staff started returning to Philmont as they could join the new "Timber Stand Improvement" team. Some also stayed at Northern Tier and continued to take out crews throughout the summer.

The full-time staff at Philmont was great to work with on this effort. We also can't say enough about the Philmont seasonal staff who joined us. They became a part of the team and provided an outstanding program to crews. Whether it was a crew originally headed to Philmont or not. The Northern Tier staff worked hard to train and assist them with their acclimation. Everyone involved was flexible, supportive, and provided an outstanding program to the crews.

While we hope an event such as this never happens again, we have learned a lot from this experience. In the future, there are some things the bases will do to streamline the hiring and training process.

A big thank you to the SAA and all the supporters for providing the first year staff gift to these Philmont staff. This helped with outfitting them to be successful on the trail.

Photo by Tim Huemiller



## Over 20 years of the “Northern Tier Seasonal Staff Scholarship Program”

By Vern Miller

This fall the Charles L. Sommers Alumni Association, Inc. (SAA) celebrated over twenty years of providing academic scholarships to the seasonal staff at Northern Tier. The program provides \$1,000 scholarships that may be received up to three times.

Applicants must be in their second year on staff or later and in good academic standing. When applying applicants submit a scholarship application, essay, and unofficial academic transcript. Northern Tier leadership also provides recommendations. The SAA's Board of Directors select recipients who best exemplify the ideals of the scholarship program.

This year we were able to provide 17 scholarships to very dedicated and well deserving staff members: Carson Berry, Richard Biggio-Gottshlich, John Butkevicius, Adam Chamberlian, Brian Dvorak, Madison Fleming, Heath Geil-Haggerty, Connor Kooistra, Joshua Lambert, Holden Muller-McKinstry, Isaac Olona, Joseph Prochaska, Quentin Rench, Cole Russell, Chrissy Turk, Tyler Vincent, and Joseph Wilson.

The program has ten named scholarships. Scholarships have been established by individuals

and those honoring or memorializing others. These named scholarships have reasonable requirements established by the donors. For example, the Erickson scholarship is for an outstanding base staff member and the Wall scholarship is for Eagle Scouts.

Besides the named scholarships, annual donations from our members are critical. Our members make the program a success as the named scholarships only cover a part of the program expenses.

This program has provided a way for staff members to supplement the cost of their education. It also has provided a meaningful and positive way to encourage staff recruitment and retention.

Scholarship recipient Chrissy Turk puts it this way, “Knowing that the Sommers Alumni Association supports my educational pursuits makes me feel extremely valued as a Northern Tier staff member! The scholarship will go a long way in helping me to cover course fees and other costs as I work to complete my degree.”

Thank you for your support of Northern Tier's seasonal staff members!

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## Volunteer at “Red Renner Memorial” alumni work week

By Dick Shank and Mike Holdgrafer

Volunteer at “Red Renner Memorial” alumni work week from May 27th to June 9th. This is your chance to support the Northern Tier programs and facilities. You'll earn a “sweat-equity” polo shirt and enjoy camaraderie with your fellow alumni while giving back.

We can use help for a day or a week, so come as early and stay as late as you can! Bring your skills and enthusiasm; we will provide on-the-job training and tools. We will provide meals and bunkhouse accommodations at no cost to you. As a bonus, you can take part in training week activities as your interest and time allow.

On Monday, June 3rd you'll be able to join us for our annual work week dinner and social.

Looking to share your knowledge with over 200 staff? Volunteer to present during seminar day on Tuesday, June 4th. On this day staff select seminars on topics of their interest. Seminar topics range from core to more advanced topics and skills. Example topics include paddling, navigation, ecology, history, geology, and photography.

Once seminar day concludes for the day, we will meet on the waterfront to memorialize those who have crossed their last portage. In the evening we will

### Work week: May 27th - June 9th

- Arrange your participation in advance by registering at [holry.org](http://holry.org) (see the box “Upcoming Events”).
- Come as early and stay as late as you can. Arrivals starting Monday, May 27th with departure by June 10th.

gather for the SAA's “Seasonal Staff Support and Recognition” program presentation. Each year the SAA provides staff with a gift, to support them in their role and to recognize their years of service.

**This year there are a few new changes in the requirements to volunteer.** You must follow these requirements as there is no exception. Before arrival, you must complete the Boy Scouts of America Youth Protection Training. You must also bring a completed Boy Scouts of America Annual Health and Medical Record form. Further details are available on the registration page.



Photo by Tim Huemiller

## It had been far too long

*By Randy Childers*

The spring of 2018 finally brought me to my long-anticipated goal of participating in “work week” at Northern Tier. It had been far too long in coming as my time as a “Charlie Guide” dates back to the early '70s. The opportunity finally presented itself. My career as Director of Engineering for Hyatt Hotels concluded and my busy “retirement” schedule aligned. I responded to the association’s request for volunteers and headed north from Atlanta for the long drive to Moose Lake.

I arrived before the Memorial Day weekend and a few days ahead of most of the volunteers. I presented myself to Bryan Christensen to see if he could put a retired facilities guy to work. Turns out that wasn’t a problem. There’s always plenty to do to get the base open! I had a great time working with Bryan, Luke, Jason, Zach, and the rest of the ranger team, on whatever odd jobs they could turn up to involve me in.

Given that I hadn’t seen the base in over twenty years, I was amazed by the evolution and sophistication of the facilities. The new Sandy Bridges Program Center was very impressive.

With the arrival of the rest of the volunteers a few days later, we got started in earnest on our big project. Under the direction of Dick Shank, we got started on our ambitious deck addition.

What a great opportunity it was to see old friends and to make some excellent new friends. Although we had to squint and study each other to pick the 20-year-old out of their 65-70-year-old selves! We brought a diversity of skills and experience. It was impressive how well we were able to integrate and complement each other’s abilities and strengths. We built a pretty darn professional-looking deck!

My two weeks at the base also presented another

opportunity. When I Swamped in 1970, I had the privilege of training with Bill Finucane. Bill left me with the gift of a lifetime, his passion for our natural world. He had us up before dawn sharing his extensive knowledge of birding, through birdsong. He traipsed us through the woods around the base, identifying every tree, bush and berry.

He had us on the waterfront late at night taking his choreographed tour through the stars and constellations. His insistence that we respond back in rote, with every name he gave us, cemented most of what he taught us in my brain. To this day I can reconstruct and share his tour of the heavens with my family on our beach vacations. What a gift he gave us.

Bill lost his life that next winter to hypothermia after swamping on the Missouri River. He was scouting for climbing locations. It was a terrible loss. Looking through the old documentation and letters in the library in the Lodge, it was clear he had an influence on Sandy as well.

Armed with Bill’s knowledge, during the work week I was out at 6am every morning with an open invitation to all staff, to join us for a “Birding by Ear” session. Dick Shank joined me most of the time, I appreciated him expanding my knowledge with his lifetime of experience in the Northwoods.

I have to say that my time at the base this spring was everything I had hoped it would be, and more. I plan to be back again for many more in the future. I want to encourage you to take advantage of this unique and rewarding opportunity to touch base. Give back to this place and the idea that has given so much to us. Red-Eye.





**Award of Excellence:** "Trail Family" by Davis Kellogg

## **2018 SAA Staff Photo Contest**

**Award of Merit:** "Bald Rock Falls" by Davis Kellogg

**Award of Merit:** "Good morning on Birch Lake"  
by Jared Stephens



## A map on a wall

*By Joe Mingrone*

A map hangs on a wall in my living room. It has seen many faces and touched many lives. It brought together the finest growing family anyone could ever ask for. There is a growing number of individuals who come into my house. They always show others where they have been. As life continues they seem to continue their journey up north.

It wasn't before long I had found myself on two wheels heading to the far Northland. It was the first long-distance motorcycle ride I had ever taken. It wasn't the ride itself that I was looking forward to. It was the fulfillment, in the call for adventure. A spirit found in those who are Charlie Guides old and new.

Upon arrival at Northern Tier to take a crew out as an alumni Interpreter, I was greeted by new faces and buildings. Without hesitation, the current staff took me in as one of their own.

Many of our participants and staff would not have the same opportunities if it not for scouting. For those who have the desire to put the map in the pack and go, the world is never quite the same.

This experience marked the 21st canoe trek I have led at Northern Tier. I keep coming back for more. Hungry for the Northwoods and the desire to make a positive impact on others.

Growing up, I never knew how to fish. Through our alumni's guidance at Northern Tier, I had built upon these skills. For me, it was never about catching

the most fish or the biggest fish. It was about teaching new skills and creating those "once in a lifetime" moments.

Over time I have adopted traditions that are non-traditional in today's canoeing world. I carry a 12-inch cast iron skillet and lid. My most recent crew ended up having two large fish fries consisting of fresh bass, walleye, lake trout, and potato chips. We picked fresh blueberries for a chocolate cake. Then baked it with hot coals from a fire and topped it off with vanilla icing. Who knew you could eat so well in the wilderness.

There are always new things that stick with you when you come back from the wilderness. I will never forget about the new memories created with my crew over our nine-day 100-mile canoeing trip in the Quetico Provincial Park. Traveling to unfamiliar territory. The sound of the moose calling in the morning. The dancing light of the campfire on the faces of friends. The time I woke up at 2am to scare away the encroaching bear.

Those memories tend to stick with you long after you have left. At our Rendezvous closing program, one of my fellow brothers broke out into tears while reading "Up North." It is good to know we have a connection to this place. Long after our physical departure from the Northwoods. That feeling that was once... and still is... a dream in the making.

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## Alumni head north for "work week"

*By Bill Erickson*

In late May alumni head to the base for "work week." That is the traditional name, but it is much more than that.

It is working on projects, teaching classes, and leading seminars. It is about reconnecting with old (and young) friends and sharing special memories. It is about getting to know the individuals who make up the current staff. It is also about being part of the ever-changing and growing program at Northern Tier.

Alumni started arriving before Memorial Day, and a few were still there after the middle of June. The major project last year was adding a deck to the "welcome cabin." There were also three Wilderness First Aid courses conducted. Volunteers also helped lead a full schedule of sessions on "seminar day."

Once again Dick Shank organized "work week" activities and Mike Holdgrafer pulled together "seminar day." Participating alumni were Jim Barrot, Chris Bursch, Randy Childers, Laura Damon, Butch Diesslin, Bill Erickson, Mike Holdgrafer, Karl Huemiller,

Tim Huemiller, Don Lee, Sandra Lee, Alex Nepple, Neal Olsen, Steve Niedorf, Allen Rench, Chuck Rose, Terry Shocke, and Nick Vigilante.

The work week culminated with a catered dinner at the general manager's house. Once again it was a great time at the base... and we got to see the first use of the deck!





## Images from 2018 alumni work week

By Tim Huemiller



John showing off his third-year guide pack from the SAA's Seasonal Staff and Recognition Program.



Alumni gather during seminar day at alumni work week.



Randy Childers and Laura Damon installing steps to the new welcome cabin deck.



The completed welcome cabin deck built by alumni during work week.



Steve Niedorf presenting at seminar day.



The Philmont staff arrive at Northern Tier after a 24-hour bus trip.





Charles L. Sommers Alumni Association, Inc.  
PO Box 428  
Ely, Minnesota 55731

## Calendar of events

### Alumni Work Week

May 27 – June 9, 2019  
Northern Tier High Adventure, Ely, MN

### Seminar Day at Alumni Work Week

June 4, 2019  
Northern Tier High Adventure, Ely, MN

### Reunion

August 23 – 25, 2019  
Northern Tier High Adventure, Ely, MN

### Reunion Banquet and Auction

August 24, 2019  
Ely, MN

### Canoecopia

March 13 – March 15, 2020  
Madison, WI

### Alumni Dinner

March 14, 2020  
Madison, WI

For further information and to register, visit the  
website at [holry.org](http://holry.org)

## Officers

### President:

Karl Huemiller, [REDACTED]

### Vice President:

Eric Peterson, [REDACTED]

### Corporate Secretary:

Brian Lux, [REDACTED]

### Treasurer:

Roger Dellinger, [REDACTED]

## Reflections Newsletter

### Editor:

Alex Nepple, [REDACTED]

## Wanted: Treasurer

**We're looking for a new volunteer to serve as  
the association's treasurer!**

The treasurer is responsible for the financial operations of the corporation. This includes facilitating annual tax returns handled by an outside firm. Interested individuals should have related experience.

If you're interested, contact Karl Huemiller.

Photos by Tim Huemiller



Mike Holdgrafer bolting a  
handrail to the deck.



Neal Olsen working on the deck.



Alex Nepple and Karl  
Huemiller installing  
new iPads donated by  
the SAA.