

Web Camping

With Right Software, Keeping in Touch With Your Sleep-away Child Is a Lot Easier Than You Think

By Renatt Brodsky
Special to New York Resident

Last summer, Manhattan dad Michael Zwick couldn't wait to turn on his computer every morning when he got to work. That's because he was excited to see if there were new pictures of his then-13-year-old son, Harry, a camper at Brookwood Camps in Glen Spey, NY, hitting a home run or white-water rafting.



Cyber-Bodyguard: Parents keep in touch

Surfing Bunk1.com, a Web site that links camps to parents, browsing for new pictures of Harry became one of his favorite pastimes.

"Bunk1 was invaluable to me last summer," said Zwick, who checked Bunk1's photo gallery a few times a day. "Whenever I missed my son, I would just click on the site and see pictures of Harry playing sports." Seeing Harry enjoying himself provided Michael with peace of mind while his son was away last summer.

For Zwick and other worried parents — particularly of first-time campers — Bunk1 is just what the doctor ordered. Not only can parents witness the fun their kids are having through photos, but they can also send their kids a one-way e-mail or Bunk Note, post a newsletter or mail a care package.

Here's how it works: Go to Bunk1.com and log on to the site with your user word and password. Then, depending on which service you want to use, click on Photo Gallery, Bunk Notes or Newsletter. The service costs \$15 per user and e-mails are a dollar a page. Parents can also purchase pictures for \$3.50 and order the images on T-shirts and mugs for approximately \$12 to \$20.

According to Scott Fiedler, owner of

Brookwood Camps, parents love the Bunk1 photo gallery. "Being able to see pictures of their kids helped to reduce the number of phone calls we received in the first week of camp last year."

"We provide an opportunity for parents to see what's going on at camp," said Ari Ackerman, 31, CEO and founder of Bunk1.com. "They get the chance to experience the magic of camp that their kids are always talking about." Ackerman, a Manhattan native who spent many summers as a camper at sleep-away camp, understands the desire for parents and kids to communicate while away from one another. "Our goal is to enable parents to stay connected with their kids at camp while giving camp owners the resource to easily manage their online presence."

Ackerman launched Bunk1 during the summer of 1999, shortly after graduating from the Kellogg Graduate School of Management at Northwestern University. With already 600 day and sleep-away camps signed up for this summer, Ackerman has seen more interest in his company this year from both parents and camp owners. "Since Sept. 11, people have become more family oriented," said Ackerman. "Parents are even more concerned about sending their kids away this summer."

Additionally, as a result of the Anthrax mail scare occurring all over the county, Ackerman said that camps were calling him earlier this year to sign up for the one-way e-mail option as an alternative to snail mail. "Camps are more fearful of accepting letters in the mail this year."

Concerned about the security of his campers, Dave Stricker, co-owner of Camp Wah-Nee located in Connecticut, is excited about using Bunk1 for the first time this summer. "Bunk1 provides us with a level of security that we can't provide on our own," he said. "We don't want the wrong kinds of people having access to the names and faces of our campers." Stricker predicts the amount of snail mail campers will receive will be less than in years past. "They will be even more excited to read the printed-out e-mail that their parents sent them that day." ■

E-mail responses to editor in chief Mark Rifkin at markr@resident.com.

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