



Winter Camp Information for Participants and Families

Winter Camp is an exceptional experience which has inspired youth and adult leaders for nearly 50 years. It has its roots as a local function of Scouting's Order of the Arrow, while continuing to be an effective event independent of this structure. Certainly, it is guided by the principles of the Scout Oath and Law, promoting camping with responsible outdoor programs while developing leaders of character and spirit who perpetuate a habit of cheerful service to others.

After decades of providing facilities for Scout camping between Christmas and New Years, in 2025 the Michigan Crossroads Council decided to close its camps during the last two weeks of December. In addition, its Order of the Arrow lodge created a rule to limit adult participation specifically for Winter Camp, should it be held at a different time. As a result, Winter Camp is now under the auspices of its alumni. It will be held at a different site not part of the Council or its lodge.

Participation:

Participants should be currently or previously registered in Scouting, preferably as members of the Order of the Arrow. Participants over 18 will be able to attend under their own accord; however, youth younger than 18 will need to have a parent or guardian as a participant.

Program:

The motto of Winter Camp – *Traditionally Unconventional* – could be taken in its simple form as an oxymoron. However, it represents an approach to maintain essential traditions, while employing creative approaches for new experiences. Some unique elements of Winter Camp include its own time zone, measurement system, dictionary, and even published novels.

Typically, Winter Camp is a three- or four-night event held between December 26-31. Accommodations are in heated cabins with opportunities for tent camping or even sleeping under-the-stars. Many events are conducted outside, involving both physical and mental activities, frequently in a competitive environment. Some activities are held indoors. There are opportunities to participate in special ceremonies and faith-based programs. While some activities are repeated, there are new ones each year, often unique.

Developing leaders is an outcome of a successful program. Winter Camp is an educational experience, where an annual theme may provide some fun activities, but also teach something more of cultural or historical significance. Everyone in attendance has an opportunity to pursue new hobbies. Winter Camp has helped youth aspire to successful careers. The participant return rate to the event year-after-year has been exceptional.

Food Service:

A full menu with three meals and a snack is provided daily. Participants learn to bake bread and make pizza from scratch. Many meals follow a theme and feature new dishes or behaviors, such as the “Prison Breakfast” or “Emily Post Dinner.” Everyone has a role in meal preparation, and will often learn to make things from scratch rather than simply opening a box. In the early years, when Winter Campers were from families that had roots in the Great Depression, they learned to save money by making things from raw ingredients. A small trading post is usually available, where campers may purchase buffalo nickels to use with the vintage candy machine.

The food operation is guided by software to ensure balanced meals to supply enough energy to the participants. (Yes – the program measures calories.) Winter Camp has its own recipe book, and customized preparation materials are provided for each meal. This food preparation system, developed for Winter Camp, was used by a council for a Scout summer camp.

Adult Leadership:

Winter Camp has been blessed with abundant adult leadership, largely due to its success. Three of the participants attending the first one in 1977 are still involved, having attended every one since then. While there is always an adult adviser for the youth leader and his or her assistants, other adults take supportive roles. However, Winter Camp is unique in that adults do not sit around drinking coffee all day, rather they participate appropriately in the activities.

Adults at Winter Camp come with a wide range of talents and experiences to share with the youth. Their current or past professions may include accountants, CEOs, computer programmers, developers, doctors, electricians, engineers, managers, mathematicians, mechanics, professors, Scout executives, teachers, technicians, and veterinarians. Yet, Winter Camp can provide knowledge and growth in leadership skills for all ages.

Adult (18+) participants must have an unexpired Youth Protection Training certification or the new Safeguarding Youth Training Certification, but do not need to be currently registered in Scouting to attend camp offsite of a council property.

Health and Safety:

Winter Camp will follow the guidelines related to its Scouting background and from governmental authorities. A certified health officer will be present at camp. A review of the program will be conducted to assure adherence to health and safety standards. Since Winter Camp is not now a function of the council, its participants and leadership will not be covered by Scouting’s liability or secondary medical insurance policies.

All participants are required to submit a health information form. Efforts will be made to address special dietary or other restrictions. A formal check-in upon arrival is required to verify the presence of the necessary forms, emergency contacts, and current health status. Family members will want to be sure to have the cell phone numbers of key leaders, but should know that cell coverage is not always dependable and a response may be delayed.

Registration and Preparation:

The registration process and fees will be announced. Participants are advised that there is typically a deadline of a week in advance. While group gear is provided, personal gear will be necessary for a three- or four-night experience, both for indoors and extended time outdoors. If an individual is planning to camp outside one or more nights, extra sleeping gear may be needed. Temperatures at Winter Camp have ranged from -13 to 58 degrees.