

## Leaner vouchers don't faze camper parents

### Camp Bangor vouchers down in dollar value, quantity

Journalist: Dawn Gagnon

BANGOR DAILY NEWS PHOTO BY KEVIN BENNET  
Ada Vancil of Hampden pets Elliot, a golden retriever at the Our Camp Bangor Fair on Wednesday, Feb. 11, 2009 at the Bangor Civic Center. Children and their parents learned about a variety of camps including Carden's Canine College, where students bring their dog to camp to learn about canine care and training. This is the tenth year that Camp Bangor has been able to provide financial assistance to parents of students in grades four through six with the support of the Libra Foundation. [Buy Photo](#)



BANGOR, Maine — Despite the fact that the value of vouchers has dropped by half and that third-graders no longer are eligible, many of the parents who attended the annual Camp Bangor Camp Fair on Wednesday are seeing the glass as half-full.

“It’s still a major benefit,” said Tracy Elliott, parent of two eligible children who used their vouchers last year to participate in a variety of programs, ranging from horse riding and art to golf and Girl Scouts.

“We’ll probably do the same things as last year,” Elliott said, adding, “To be honest, we were hard-pressed to spend the whole [voucher] amount last year. In hard economic times like this, I’d rather have it spread to serve more people.”

Ginny Gilmore, whose two daughters are eligible, also still thought the vouchers were a boon.

“We’re going to camp,” she said, calling the voucher program “absolutely a gift — absolutely.”

A Camp Bangor summary report for 2008 prepared by United Way of Eastern Maine shows that 1,045 children enrolled in grades three through six at the city’s public schools were eligible for the program last summer.

Of those, 831 went to camp at a total cost of \$583,000, a tab that was covered by the Libra Foundation, according to the summary.

This year, however, the rocky economy has forced the Portland-based foundation to scale back its charitable giving, including its annual allocations for summer camp programs in Bangor, Portland and Lewiston, according to United Way spokeswoman Emma Pope-Welch.

As a result, the dollar value of Camp Bangor vouchers has been cut from \$1,000 to \$500 per eligible child, said Pope-Welch and Sara Yasner, United Way's community impact associate, on Wednesday.

In addition, third-graders were eliminated from the program, which means about 250 fewer children will be served, they said.

To help families stretch their voucher dollars, many summer camps and institutions that offer summer programs are offering more affordable options and, in some cases, financial aid.

Among them is the Coldbrook Equestrian Center in Hampden, where the cost of its canter and jumping camps has been cut from \$400 to \$350 a week and group rates and discounts for attending multiple weeks of camp are being offered this year, said Jill Schnedler, a center trainer.

Potential campers also were invited to enter a coloring contest in which the winner will receive a free week of instruction, she said.

"It helps families, and it helps me, too, because more people are able to come," she said of the price breaks.

The Bangor Y also was willing to help any child who needs it, according to Tracy Souza, the Y's youth and family director. Assistance includes the Y's "Pay it Forward" program funded by local businesses and scholarships provided through United Way.

The city of Bangor's parks and recreation program also is offering low-cost day camp programming that this year will be expanded to grades six through eight, recreation superintendent Debbie Gendreau said. Financial aid is available for children who meet financial guidelines.

For more information about the Camp Bangor program, visit [www.unitedwayem.org](http://www.unitedwayem.org).