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"Truth Above All Else"

Camp Merz Property Sale Is The Right Move

Mark Williams, an attorney in Olean and majority leader of the Cattaraugus County Legislature, believes strongly in the importance of Boy Scouting in the lives of today's youth. He was a Boy Scout himself and as an adult has given a considerable amount of his volunteer time over the years to help ensure that the Scouting program continues. He serves now as the president of the board of the Allegheny Highlands Council of the Boy Scouts of America, which includes Chautauqua, Cattaraugus and Allegany counties in New York and McKean and Potter counties in Pennsylvania.

As you can imagine, Williams' volunteer job is never easy. It has been particularly taxing the past few weeks since the council's plan to sell parts of Camp Merz near Mayville has been in the news.

Briefly, the board has decided to sell parts of Camp Merz that are not used and to put the money into an endowment which will provide long-term funding for the council's operating budget.

The plan has not gone down well with some. People who serve on the boards of local charitable foundations and the United Way, though, clearly understand the importance of an endowment — it is what board members of other non-profit agencies hope to have as well, at least those who take seriously their financial responsibilities. They know area charitable foundations and the United Way would go broke trying to pay the operating expenses of non-profit agencies year after year. They know that organizations like the Boy Scouts need to find a way to be self-sustaining through a combination of fund-raising, wise use of assets, an annual share of United Way money and some help from time to time from the foundations.

The members of the board, many of whom grew up in Boy Scouting and have come up through the ranks as adult volunteers, know that selling part of a beloved property is one of the most difficult things a council can do. However, they also understand well that Boy Scouting is about serving youth, not property. They know that, ultimately, absent the financial ability to sustain the Boy Scout program throughout the council, neither Camp Merz nor the 1,600-acre Elk Lick camp near Smethport have a reason for being.

We applaud the Boy Scout Council's determination to increase its endowment by tapping the resources of unused property. In that way, the gift Frank Merz gave to the Boy Scouts so many years ago will continue to be a place where children will learn and grow and just have fun in the out of doors. And it also will be a major factor in ensuring that the Boy Scout program will always be available to the youth of this area.

What a wonderful tribute to the man whose generosity has meant so much to generations of young people.