

Michigan camping trends

- In 2017, the total direct economic output in the state from the RV industry was nearly \$696 million, according to RVs Move America.

- As of 2017, there were over 1,100 licensed private RV parks and campgrounds in Michigan, which represent more than 150,000 campsites, according to the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality.

Camping trends in America

- Camping attracted 40.5 million campers in 2016.

- Campers logged a collective 587.2 million camping days, or an average of 14.5 days per person.

- Adult participants spent an average of \$546.41 on camping gear. Flashlights and coolers were the most popular purchases for first-time campers.

- Participants traveled an average of 136.8 miles from home to their camping destinations.

- The average age for a camper's first camping trip was 10. After age 15, the likelihood of being exposed to camping dramatically dropped.

- A reported 74% of adult participants used a smartphone while camping.

Source: Data from the 2017 American Camper Report

As the camping season heats up statewide, members of the GMC Great Lakes Motorhome Club display their recreational vehicles May 3 in Clinton Township.

Photo by Deb Jacques



HAPPY CAMPERS

Around the campfire, the talk is of memories, camaraderie

BY MARIA ALLARD

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The scent of charcoal smoldering in the air. The sounds of kids playing cornhole. The sight of a freighter sailing Lake St. Clair.

Watching the sunset from a chaise lawn chair.

That was the scene May 25 when campers found their sanctuary at Algonac State Park in Marine City. Many camping enthusiasts trekked to their favorite St. Clair County park for some rest, camaraderie, s'mores, nature, mosquitoes and beer.

They visited with each other outside recreational vehicles, set up tents to get ready to sleep beneath the stars, and sipped on cool beverages next to decked-out motorhomes.

Cheryl Dubay, 64, of St. Clair Shores, met up with family members and friends at the state park for Memorial Day weekend, something they have done for decades. Dubay's "camp" included her mom, Margaret Wyon, 86, of Clinton Township; family members Sherry Kaurich, 83, and her husband, George Kaurich, 86, of Warren; and friends Paul Winter, 84, and Marilyn Winter, 83, of Shelby Township. The four generations of campers included grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

"We play games, we sit around the fire at night and we talk," Dubay said. "Sometimes, the kids swim. We really enjoy camping and each other's company. We're really blessed in Michigan to have these state parks."

Dubay said the tradition began about 60 years ago, when her dad first took the family camping. Then followed trips to Algonac, Caseville, Canada and Wyoming. Her dad died 11 years ago, but "he's still here in memories."

Sherry and George Kaurich are camping veterans. On their most recent trip, they drove to Arizona in their RV for a granddaughter's wedding.

"We put 2,000 miles going and 2,000 miles back," George Kaurich said of the experience that took them through Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Missouri, Oklahoma, Kansas, Texas and New Mexico. "Every state has got something different to see."

When Paul and Marilyn Winter started out camping, their first adventures were by tent. They gradually moved to a pop-up trailer, then from a Class C trailer to Class A one. They've logged thousands of miles taking in scenic views of the U.S. and Canada, with Utah and Colorado Springs among their memorable sights.

Paul Winter's camping days go back to his childhood, when the family spent summers in a 9-by-9-foot teepee tent lakeside outside Flint.

"We went fishing, swimming," he said. "It was just fun to get away."

The group has witnessed some changes in camping over the years.

"The trailers are bigger," Paul Winter said.

"More people," Sherry Kaurich said.

"More dogs," George Kaurich said.

Sixteen-year-old Amanda Vogel and family, including her parents and her 10-month-old pooch, Chester, visited Algonac State Park for Memorial Day weekend. The Vogels, of Grosse Pointe Woods, like to lounge around their 31-foot Outback trailer.

"Most of the summer I'm here every other weekend," Amanda Vogel said. "I like bringing my friends and hanging out, going swimming and riding my bike."

It's a new experience for some of her friends, who have never camped before. They'll explore the campground woods or head over to the swamp area. When the bugs start to swarm, Vogel "goes inside and shuts all the doors and windows."

She would love to take a trip out West. And what does her dad, 52-year-old Allen Vogel, like best about camping?

"No worries. No stress," he said.



Photo by Maria Allard

Those who headed to Algonac State Park this past Memorial Day weekend were greeted by William Arnold, who was the camp host. For Arnold, camping is “total relaxation.”

BONDING OVER BONFIRES

Those who headed to Algonac State Park on Memorial Day weekend were greeted by host William Arnold. The park has a different camp host every month.

“As camp host, we greet people. We help them,” said Arnold, 69, who began camping 15 years ago with his wife, Lori Arnold.

“My wife likes it. We bought a smaller camper. Then we bought this one,” said Arnold, the owner of a 30-foot Laredo from Keystone RV Co. The couple usually camps about five times a year, sometimes in Algonac and sometimes in Harrisville, “by the Alpena, Oscoda area.”

When camping in Algonac, Arnold likes to sit by the fire, walk around, take a bike ride, stop by the shooting range or watch the boats go by.

“It’s total relaxation. You’re away from your phone. You’re away from your house,” Arnold said. “You can do whatever you want. Campers are a different breed. Anyone will help each other out. A lot of people don’t spend time in their campers. They are out and about.”

Over the three-day weekend, 12-year-old Zack Howey, of Warren, camped with his mom and



Photo by Deb Jacques

Becky Johnson, the GMC Great Lakes Motorhome Club president, gives a presentation May 3 on the 1973-78 GMC RVs at the Lorenzo Cultural Center in Clinton Township.

dad, Becky Howey, 42, and Matt Howey, 49, and many other family members at Algonac State Park.

“We come every Memorial Day,” Becky Howey said. The fam-

ily has a pop-up trailer and brings along their pets. “We play badminton and cornhole.”

Becky Howey first camped with her parents and brother about

40 years ago, and both generations have carried on the tradition. For Matt Howey, the “family camaraderie” is the best thing about camping.

Zack Howey, who is interested in military history and performs locally in Civil War re-enactments, didn't want the holiday weekend to go by without signifying the real reason for Memorial Day. At the campsite, he set up a tribute to the fallen soldiers who gave the ultimate sacrifice.

"We do have people that stop by and thank him for honoring that," Matt Howey said.

"I had so many relatives that were in the military," Zack Howey said. That includes grandpa Bill Kloski, of Fraser, also an avid camper.

"We've been coast to coast. It's relaxing to get away for a while," Kloski, 73, said. "I like to go to Disney World in Florida, and my wife, Christine, likes Yellowstone."

When in Algonac, the Kloskis' grandchildren bring their friends. Everyone likes to gather for meals and games under the large canopy known as "the mess tent."

"They come up to harass grandpa," Kloski joked.

THE RETRO RV

On Aug. 21, 2017, when the total solar eclipse made history, members of the GMC Great Lakes Motorhome Club gathered in Paducah, Kentucky, to observe the event together. It also gave them a chance to camp in their retro RVs. The group periodically holds rallies in different parts of the country from May to October to share ideas and experiences with their vehicles, and to enjoy the outdoors.

"Our club's focus is the 1973-1978 GMC Motorhomes themselves," club President Becky Johnson said in an email. "Our mission statement states that 'our purpose is to promote the enjoyment and preservation of the GMC Motorhome.'"

The club is a chapter of the Family Motor Coach Association. The criteria for chapter membership is to own at least 1/3 of a GMC Motorhome produced between 1973 and 1978. The crew usually camps for about four or five days at each rally, which often includes a group tour, but members like to keep an open schedule so they can socialize.

"We have a group of ladies who quilt that will go and visit local quilt shops," Johnson said.



Photo provided by Maria Allard

Camping has been a favorite pastime in America for decades. While growing up, Staff Writer Maria Allard, her parents — pictured here circa 1970 — and her brothers camped in 48 of the 50 U.S. states.

"On occasion, the ladies will learn a craft. Some folks play cards. We all become good friends with our common interest of the GMC Motorhome."

On May 3, Johnson gave a presentation about the 1973-78 GMC RVs at the Lorenzo Cultural Center, located on the Center Campus of Macomb Community College in Clinton Township. She shared sketches and pictures of the original clay models and talked about the history of the vehicles.

The motorhomes came in two sizes: the 23-footer and the 26-footer. In 1973, the smaller vehicle had a base price of \$13,570; the larger's base price was \$14,570.

Johnson's presentation showed vintage footage of the motorized campers performing test drives at the proving grounds in Milford and in Mesa, Arizona, driving on different pavements while turning in circles.

Maggie Houston, of Shelby Township, attended the May 3 event. She was an avid camper from 1952 until 1996, when her husband, Ralph, died. Houston, 86, spent many years camping with him and their children. They had tents and a pop-up trailer. Sometimes, Houston's brother lent them his motorhome. She also hit the trails with a group of moms and



Grosse Pointe Woods residents Allen Vogel, daughter Amanda Vogel and 10-month-old Chester love to camp at Algonac State Park.

Photo by Maria Allard

their kids when their husbands were away at work.

"It was good. We took the kids to educational places," she said. "The kids entertained themselves. The moms entertained themselves. We sat around the campsite. We told spooky stories and we sang. We have a gazillion stories. The moms, we'd have some hot toddies."

Memories include camping trips to Ludington to enjoy the beach, to the Upper Peninsula, and to Amherstburg, Ontario. Even the big city of Toronto was a camping haunt. Sometimes the

weather cooperated; other times it seemed the rain wouldn't stop.

"Each year we picked some place we knew the kids would enjoy. We swam a lot in pools, in lakes," Houston recalled. "The kids loved the freedom of not being hooked to us. They could safely play. We had a different freedom people don't have now. They got to be really good friends. They could take care of each other."

For more information on the GMC Great Lakes Motorhome Club, visit www.gmcgreatlakers.org.

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