

History of Campground Owners of New York, Inc. (CONY) (From the 1988 25th Anniversary Conference Program)

CONY evolved from a series of events beginning in the Fall of 1961 with a meeting at Bear Mountain, New York.

According to Cory Orne of Nacodi Campsites, Lake Pleasant, New York, the New York State Conservation Department called a meeting of interested people to entice private property owners to enter the recreation business to provide campsites because new York State could not keep up with the demand. At this meeting, along with others, were Rea Agnew, Eleanor & Merrill Bull, and Cory Orne.

In the Spring of 1962, a meeting was held at Kingston where a program for the organization of an association was developed. It was called CANY, taken from Campground Owners Association of New York.

The next meeting was held about a year later in 1963 at Utica, where a president, name unknown, (who was connected with a legislative committee in Albany and had a campground in the Lake George area, according to Orne) was selected). The Vice President was Mr. O.K. Meulendyke, Orchard Beach Campsite, Sodus, New York. The Secretary was Mr. Richard Southwick, Singing Waters, Old Forge, New York. A person also present at this meeting was a man from Cox's Family Campground, Greenwood Lake, New York, according to Cory Orne, who was also present. There were only 22 persons present and since that time that organization has been inactive.

The Bear Mountain meeting fired Mr. and Mrs. Bull with enough enthusiasm to continue with their own campground. They attended meetings in Springfield, Mass, sponsored by NEFCA and Dick Williams' "Campfire Chatter" and Prof. Gerry Harrison of Springfield College.

They also attended the National Park and Recreation meeting in Pittsburgh, PA. and the PA. owners meetings in Harrisburg, Hershey and State College.

All of this floundering about was in search of leadership and knowledge of the camping business, said Merrill Bull.

In the Fall of 1963 at the suggestion of N.C.H.A., five W.N.Y. campground owners met at the home of Howie Hointz (N.C.H.A. official), and decided there was a definite need for an organization of campground owners.

Twenty-six owners met in East Aurora, New York, February 20, 1964, elected officers, and launched the W.N.Y. Campground Owners Association. Officers elected were as follows:

President: Merrill Bull	Delevan-Arrowhead
Vice President: Bill Elliott	Gowanda-ZoarValley
Secretary: Patricia Brown	Corfu-Indian Lake
Treasurer: C. L. Tierce	Elma-Bennington Park
Director: Ken Unger	Eggertsville-Ken Lee Haven
Director: Robert Losey	Sardinia-Lyndon Park
Director: Robert Westfall	East Otto-Rainbow Lake
Director: Carl Hicks	Wilson-Daisy Barn

In March, 1964, W.N.Y. Campground Owners were represented at the Harrisburg meeting of Pennsylvania Campground Owners by the President, Mr. M. R. Bull, who also attended the American Camping Convention in Pittsburgh, PA. (representing New York State).

After many futile attempts to contact the former State Organization, it was decided to launch the Campground Owners of New York to meet the existing need.

Mr. Bull then met with interested owners of the Finger Lakes area on a cold Sunday afternoon in March, 1964, in a barn – the recreation hall at Frank Brundages' Hickory Hill, Bath, New York. This enthusiastic group encouraged them to go statewide.

That was the beginning of the CAMPGROUND OWNERS OF NEW YORK – C.O.N.Y.

An all-day Campground Conference was held at Trenholm East Motel at Victor, New York, December 12, 1964, sponsored by the Cooperative Extension Service Rural Resources Development and the Campground Owners of New York.

Two-hundred campground owners, prospective owners, extension personnel, representatives from interested state agencies and members of the National Campers and Hikers Associated attended.

Following a tour of the exhibits, a lively meeting brought out problems of – information for – and experiences of the campground owner.

Mr. Bull states that he was amazed at the turnout and interest, and a little bewildered that all of a sudden we had a raging bull by the tail.

During these formative years, Mr. Rea Agnew as a guiding factor.

Cornell Professor Harland Brumsted was the ringleader, the guiding light, the binding that held us all together. He had a magnetic personality and enthusiasm that kept every meeting sparkling.

We also worked closely with Dick Sandy, then President of the Pennsylvania Campground Owners. We had a lively bit of competition going between the two states. What information and ideas that we didn't exchange in friendly meetings were stolen from each other, said President Bull.

CONY held their annual meetings in conjunction with the Cornell Conference to eliminate extra traveling, until 1971, when CNY went on its own, having its first Annual CONY Conference at the Horizon Hotel, Utica, New York, October 29 – 31, 1971.

For bringing CONY along to a point where CONY can go out on its own and promote the private camping industry, thanks must be given to Professors Harlan Brumsted, Bruce Wilkins, Bernice Scott, Edward. W. Foss, and Fred E. Winch, Jr. of New York State College of Agriculture and Life Sciences of Cornell University.

The original CONY Logo was designed in 1964 by Merrill Bull, who also wrote the first twelve (12) Newsletters.

Under the leadership team of Art Bedell and Bob Kunzman, the organization was incorporated on the 10th day of February, 1971. A new Directory using a full N.Y.S. road map with write-ups was instituted. Distribution of Newsletters was greatly improved by the use of computerized address labels with the capability of obtaining different address lists as winter, summer, officers, directors, regular members, non-members, associate publishers, camping business and government leaders, also the key people connected with national and other state campground organizations.

CONY History Update – 1988 (From the 1988 25th Anniversary Conference Program)

Many of the very early records of attendance were not recorded or were lost. Many of the first attendees are no longer in business or have passed away.

From the beginning, we were a lively, interested, dedicated group. Some of our meetings at Cornell had such heated discussions that a parliamentarian was appointed to read “Robert’s Rules of Order” to keep things on an even keel.

Quite a few of the early directors and officers served many successive years because most of the owners had full time jobs outside of the campground and could not attend meetings regularly.

Our early Directories listed these campgrounds whose original owners are still operating them and are still active in CONY (editor’s note: as of 1988):

Arrowhead	Merrill and Eleanor Bull
Conesus Lake	Ed and Millie Yaniszewski
Elmtree Estates	Gene and Winifred Snyder
Ferenbaugh	Norman Callahan
Indian Village	Bob DeVinney
Lebanon Reservoir	Gailan and Carolyn Hartshorn
Mocking Bird	Walter Mattson
Pine Valley	Robert and Jo Kunzman
Rocky Dock	James C. Milks
Timber Lake	Dick and Myrt Weishan
Wood Stream	Hugh and Vera Eddy

Our newsletters have grown from a few mimeographed sheets to an award-winning publication, and our directory has grown from a two-color folder to an impressive 120 page directory. Our membership has grown from a few persevering pioneers to over 200 campgrounds.

To all the officers, directors and member, past and present, who have traveled hundreds of miles, who have made countless phone calls, who have written reams of letters and reports, and who have spent untold hours attending meetings, we dedicate this history, and this Silver Anniversary Convention.

To all the award-winners, and to all whose only reward is the satisfaction of providing a pleasurable camping experience to the work-weary tourist, and vacationer, we salute you!

May we continue to grow, and to move forward in our next 25 years. May we continue to make our industry a better one to be involved in. May we keep our organization viable, and ever-improving, dedicated to enrich, and re-create all whom we come in contact with, for no organization can be better than the people involved...and Campground Owners of New York are THE BEST.

Respectfully Submitted,
Myrt Weishan
Charter Member/Timber Lake
Written 1988

CONY history highlights through 2007, related by Robert C. Klos, Sr., Executive Administrator (retired), as told on October 30, 2013

In the first 25 years we didn't have many affiliations, but over the years we worked to strengthen CONY's position in the tourism industry and increase our influence on laws by creating partnerships with government agencies and other tourism associations like the NYS Health Department, the NYS Travel & Vacation Association, the Tourism Industry Coalition, the Governor's Tourism Advisory Council, the Department of Commerce, to name a just a very few.

As CONY grew in membership size and scope of projects, Robert C. Klos, Sr., owner operator along with wife Alice of Sugar Creek Glen Campground in Dansville, New York, was asked to take on a larger role as membership chairman, then through the efforts of then-CONY President Roger Anderson, moved on into a part-time position as Executive Administrator in the mid-70s. Bob efforts to continue growing the association and expanding its influence led to him being named full time Executive Administrator in the early 80s, as well as taking on an office assistant and moving the CONY headquarters office to Dansville, New York.

During the 70s, 80s, 90s and into the 2000s, CONY took proactive action on issues and policies that had a direct affect on its members business operations. A few highlights include working with the Adirondack Park Agency on getting rules and regulations resolved regarding seasonal camping, length of a season and camper size in parks (with work continuing today to protect campground interests in the Adirondacks); working with the Health Department on issues such as the definition of a campground versus a mobile home park and lifeguard issues, working with the NYS Dept. of Transportation and the Thruway Authority on providing roadway signage near exits, successfully lobbying on legislation that excludes campsites from occupancy tax collection and prevents property tax assessment on campers left in campgrounds year round. These issues are only the tip of the iceberg on all the legislation and policy that CONY has either spearheaded or influenced over the years, and our efforts with CONY's longtime lobbyist Peter O'Connell continues today.

CONY board presidents had a lot of influence across the country, first with Bob London serving as Chairman of the National Campground Owners Association (now ARVC – aka the National Association of RV Parks and Campgrounds), and then later Mark Anderson of Camp Chautauqua serving a term as Chairman for ARVC, and a number of other CONY members serving as directors on the national association.

CONY's influence was felt and acknowledged by others in letters published in the 1988 CONY conference program. To quote:

“The importance of CONY has also been felt by the hundreds of thousands of campers who have enjoyed your fine facilities and who continue to find memorable vacations in New York. I applaud the efforts of CONY in becoming a leading force in the tourism industry and for the positive economic impact you have brought to our state.” ~ Matthew J. Murphy, Member of the Assembly

“As the campground industry has grown, so too has the importance of CONY. From lobby the State Legislature in Albany to ensuring the highest possible consumer standards, CONY should be proud of it's 25 years of accomplishment.” ~ John M. McHugh, 46th Senatorial District

“You can be proud of the fact that CONY, along with the Department of Economic Development and the ‘I Love New York’ program, have all worked together to bring additional tourism to our local areas thereby creating employment and additional benefits to other merchants.” ~ Albert G. Kaufman, CONY President

It was during the formative years and through the 80s that CONY grew enough in membership that it became time to upgrade from the smaller promotional brochure developed by founder Merrill Bull and others, into the larger format magazine size directory, first printed on newsprint in 1978. This was greatly helped along by member Bob London, a CONY President and owner of Skyway Campground, who was directory chairman and worked to get outside advertising dollars to pay for the design and printing. One notable achievement related to the directory was getting it placed in the information centers along the NYS Thruway system, as well as numerous RV and travel shows.

Bob Kunzman of Pine Valley started a show program with the small brochure piece, then asking people, for a small charge, to include their brochure in the program. CONY did a handful of its own shows, and now the program is very robust with CONY attending at least 12 shows on its own and also sending thousands of directories to shows through services provided by distribution companies, the NYS Travel & Vacation Association and other partners.

Through the years member benefits continued to grow, with services such as credit card programs, insurance programs, vendors at conferences, seminars at conferences, implementation of Spring Zone Meetings (started by Al Kaufman back in 1988), among other services. CONY’s volunteer leaders are always doing the very best to get members involved, and being there to help members with any problems they have. CONY is meant to always be there, if asked, to support the members which we did then and we still do now.

One valuable benefit to CONY members is the volunteers of the Board of Directors. They are very important, as they take time away from running their RV parks/campgrounds/resorts to focus on the industry and the needs of the association and individual members. CONY’s always been there for the members and always will be if asked.

CONY through the years, to be a viable association, also had to move with the times. Bob Klos remembers running newsletters off on the mimeograph machine one at a time after stripping them in all by hand, and doing labels by typewriter. CONY’s first computer was given to CONY by a member campground (name unremembered), and after a learning curve CONY staff was able to utilize the new technology to improve office functions and communications. Bob marvels how these things have changed so that now CONY is a player in the digital age with an internet presence and social media interaction.

The first few years were the grassroots formative years, and then after that through the 70s, 80s and 90s we really found our footing and became the important and progressive association for our members that the founders always intended us to be.

Robert C. Klos, Sr.
CONY Executive Administrator (retired)

October 30, 2013

CONY in the Present

When Bob Klos retired, the headquarters moved from Dansville to Pittsford, New York, and CONY hired its second Executive Administrator Donald G. Bennett, Jr., whose family owns Conesus Lake Campground, and whose grandparents Ed and Millie Yaniszewski were among the founding members of CONY.

The shows program was brought back after a hiatus. The show program afforded us the luxury of bringing on a third employee to help with shows and campground visits and marketing and communications activities, including the website, directory, press releases, and social media. The show program as of 2013 has now expanded through a partnership with the NYS Travel & Vacation Association, allowing for cross participation between our members and theirs in each others' shows, helping to increase revenue.

In terms of advocacy, we've tried to stay true to our roots as much as possible and carry on the great foundation that was laid for us. We're still proactive in reaching out and assisting our members where needed in situations like town board meetings, zoning hearings, and Adirondack Park Agency hearings. With Peter O'Connell's help, we've really made the annual Tourism Action Day much larger event and CONY has sends the largest contingent compared to other associations and interests.

In recent years, we've assisted in getting passed into law a bill regarding membership campgrounds, we've refuted a bill for dump stations at campgrounds, and worked with partner associations to successfully fight a recreational sales tax initiative introduced by Governor Patterson.

CONY staff and volunteers continue the strong tradition of working with state tourism associations, including serving as board members, officers, and advisors. Bob Klos and myself have been leaders in CAMP –an association of Campground Association Management Professionals.

We took the directory from newsprint to full color gloss paper, increased the circulation and distribution scope, and rendered it into a downloadable digital version shown on the CONY website. The nycampgrounds.com and campony.com websites were updated, and we added several new affiliated and micro-websites for niche promotions. In 2014 we are launching the new NYCabinrentals.com program and are in the works to do a new and complete overhaul to the NYCampgrounds.com website. We are keeping up with the times by developing a CONY mobile app for smart phones and tablets, and we keep in contact with interested campers electronically through e-newsletters, and social media such as Facebook and Twitter, something I'm sure our founders never even considered way back when.

The CONY board of directors took 18 months to go through the process of a long range planning strategic session, and the outcome has been amazing with the most visible element CONY's new corporate logo.

In the 2000s we've gotten back as a member of the Northeast Campground Association, while a few years later, we de-affiliated from the National Association of RV Parks and Campgrounds (ARVC) over state park inclusion and several other issues.

In the seven years since becoming the second and last CONY Executive Administrator (and then re-named as CONY President and CEO during strategic planning), we've accomplished so much more than could adequately be listed here, but we can all be proud of the association we've been and continue to be because of the passion and dedication of our members.

Recently, at the suggestion of Matt Anderson of Camp Chautauqua, Stow, New York, CONY allied with Camp Good Days and Special Times to help raise funds to support camping experiences for children with Cancer. Our first year of fundraising in 2012 netted over \$44,000 in donations raised.

CONY today is an ever evolving and dynamic entity that responds and adapts to not only the changes in our industry but also those innovations and changes from the outside that impact us as business owners and keep us on our toes to execute our mission as an association dedicated to the promotion, growth, improvement and development of privately owned campgrounds in New York State.

Donald G. Bennett, Jr.
CONY President and CEO
October 30, 2013

CONY Presidents/Chairpersons

1964 to 1967 .. Merrill R. Bull
1968 to 1969 .. Robert LaPoint
1970 Frank Brundage
1971 to 1972 .. Arthur Bedell
1973 to 1974 .. Robert D. Kunzman
1975 to 1976 .. Harry Wood, Jr.
1977 to 1978 .. Roger C. Anderson
1979 to 1981 .. Olga (Ollie) Mizerak
1982 to 1983 .. Robert London
1984 to 1986 .. Edwin Lighthall
1987 to 1988 .. Albert G. Kaufman
1989 to 1990 .. Edgar Hollwedel

1990 to 1992 .. Andy Joehl
1992 to 1993 .. Ford Gilbert “Gil” Paddock
1994 to 1995 .. Barbara Lighthall
1995 to 1998 .. Ford Gilbert “Gil” Paddock
1998 to 2001 .. Mark Anderson
2001 to 2007 .. Janine Paddock
2007 to 2011 .. Scott Sherwood
2011 to Present...Michael Papp

CONY Hall of Fame Members

Criteria to consider include: CONY members at least 8 years, served as CONY board of director member or alternate, served as a director for at least 3 years, owner/operator of a quality campground, contributions to CONY and the camping industry, involvement in NY tourism, community involvement such as school boards, chambers of commerce, town board, service clubs, etc, paid personnel after retirement, past membership in CONY.

Olga “Ollie” Mizerak
Roger Anderson
Bob London
Merrill R. Bull
John VanHassent
Barbara Lighthall
Edwin Lighthall
Ford Gilbert “Gil” Paddock
Robert C. Klos, Sr.
Albert G. Kaufman
Vera Eddy
Mildred Yaniszewski
Mark Anderson
Randy S. Lehman
Janine Paddock