

JOY BRYANT/COURTESY OF CAMP GLEN ARDEN

Garrett and Erin Graham have assumed ownership of the historic Glen Arden Camp for Girls in Tuxedo, about an hour south of Asheville, N.C.

Camp's new owners are veteran campers

Couple expected to bring 'a freshness' to historic Glen Arden, its director says

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TUXEDO - Camp Glen Arden will open this season under new ownership by veteran camp directors Erin and Garrett Graham. The summer camp for girls is in the Blue Ridge Mountains near Tuxedo, about an hour south of Asheville off U.S. 25 near the South Carolina line.

"Garrett brings a lot of experience," said Elizabeth McIntosh, camp director at Glen Arden. "It's one thing to own a camp, but another thing to 'do camp.' He brings that piece to the table, which is huge. He's been successful, he runs a good program, and he walks the walk."

The camp, once located at Christ School in Arden, was founded in 1951 by Mary Bell. The Bell family operated Glen Arden as a sister camp to Camp Arrowhead for Boys for 45 years. In 1996, the camp was purchased under the leadership of longtime director Carol "Casey" Thurman.

Each summer, Glen Arden is home to roughly 125 campers per three- or four-week session and offers traditional camp activities including horseback riding, archery, drama and pottery. Campers also enjoy nontraditional activities such as weaving and Zumba. The camp's Adventure program is a hallmark, giving campers the opportunity to hike a portion of the Appalachian Trail each summer.

Camp Glen Arden is the only girls' camp in Western North Carolina listed in the National Register of Historic Places.

Camps in Western North Carolina served roughly 53,000 children in 2010, according to an economic impact study commissioned by the N.C. Youth Camping Association and conducted by N.C. State University. The study found that summer camps in four WNC counties generated $365 million in local spending and $33 million in tax revenue in 2010.

The Grahams have been involved in camping well before the study was conducted. Erin, formerly a middle and high school English teacher, has been working full-time in the field of camping since 2009. Garrett began his career in camping with the YMCA in 1996 and residential summer camping in 2000.

The couple grew up in Columbia, South Carolina, and have a 3-year-old son named Henry. Prior to joining the Camp Glen Arden family, Erin and Garrett served as the directors for many summers at an all-girls summer camp in Flat Rock.

McIntosh, one of 12 initial owners who formed the LLC to purchase the camp in 1996, said her hope is that the Grahams will continue the rich legacy of Glen Arden while also bringing new perspectives.

"Garrett and Erin are going to bring a freshness," McIntosh said. "Some things need to change, and it will be a healthy, good change."

In the end, she continued, it isn't really about the owner. "It's really about the campers who come here," she said. "It's their place — it's their experiences that create the space that makes the difference."