

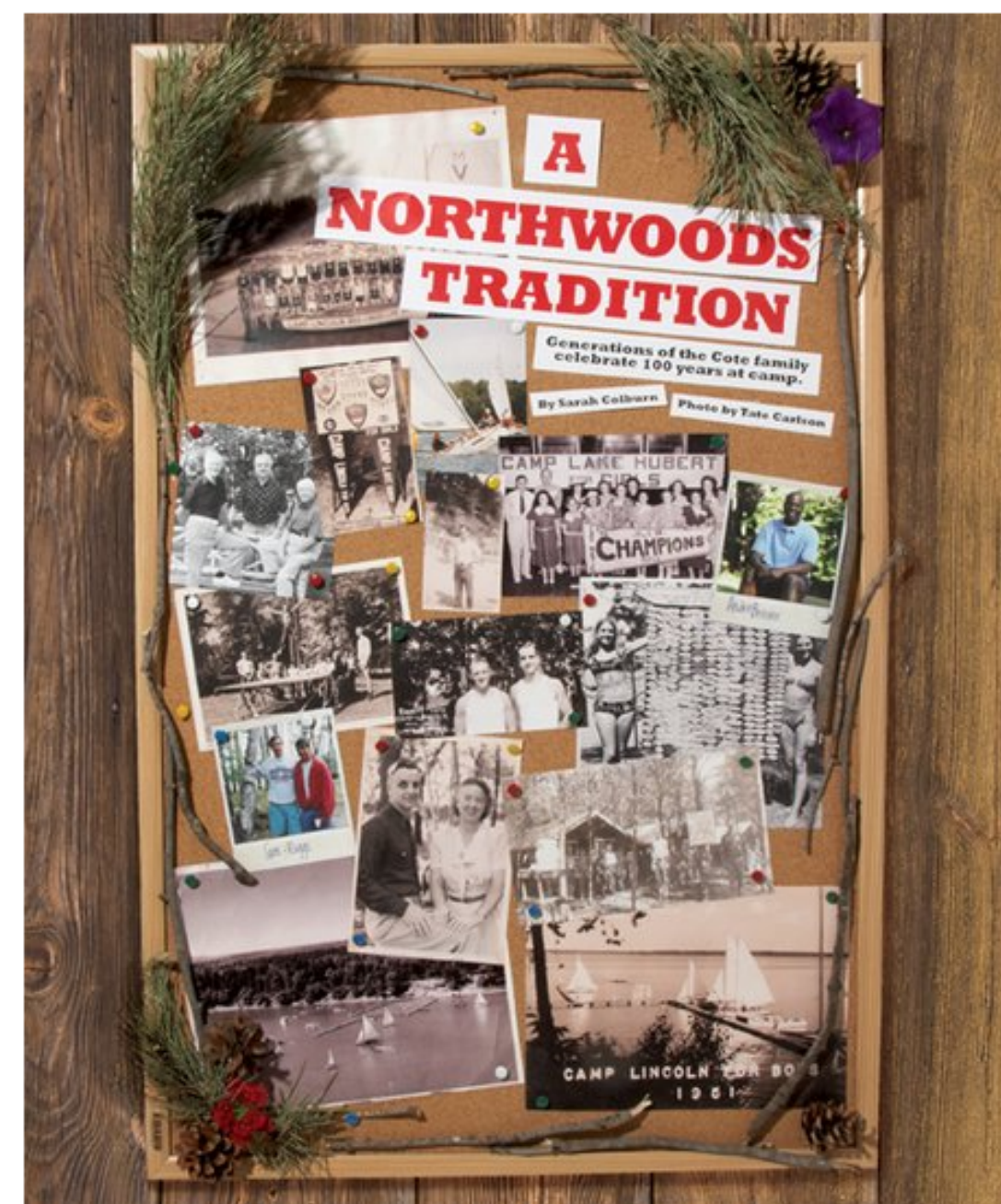
# TWIN CITIES METRO

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## A NORTHWOODS TRADITION

By Sarah Colburn

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(Photo by Tate Carlson)

Kelly Jasper vividly remembers the ringing of the big, antique bell at Camp Lincoln, deep in the Northwoods. Its sound would echo across the lake waking campers and welcoming the day.

That bell guided her and her siblings through the entire summer, as they jumped from activity to activity—sailing and hiking, swimming and archery. Though the family lived in Edina, they summured at Camp Lincoln and Camp Lake Hubert in the Brainerd lakes area. It was a tradition that began in 1923 when her grandfather Reynold Frederick Brownlee Cote (Brownie for short)—who also summured at the camp—an Edina resident, first bought the property. Later, it was Sam Cote, Jasper’s father, who ran the camp, as he still does today, welcoming his own grandchildren to the rustic cabins.

In the 100 years of camp history, more than 30,000 campers from across the United States and 13 countries have flocked to the 800-acre oasis. More than 1,400 kids a season attend the camp to learn new skills and make new friends.

“It’s such a rewarding experience,” Cote says. “You’re connecting, you’re making a difference with kids, you’re developing kids.”

Camp Lincoln, the boy’s camp, was originally part of The Blake School for boys. Brownie was an athlete and an outdoorsman; he worked as a camp counselor during college around 1919 and returned summer after summer. He went on to receive his MBA and attend law school at Yale, but when the leaders of The Blake School no longer had use for the camp, Brownie purchased it to continue the tradition.

“My dad was a visionary,” Sam says.

Within years of purchasing the camp, Brownie and his wife, Julia (Judy) Thorpe Cote, opened the girl’s camp, Camp Lake Hubert, across the lake. Brownie saw the opportunity to expand the business further and purchased nearby Grandview Lodge along with some dude ranch properties in Arizona.

In the early years, families from the south migrated to northern Minnesota to keep cool. The ranch, Sam says, allowed him to provide his staff with year-round work, and Grandview gave the campers’ families a summer home.

Sam, in his mid-60s, has spent a lifetime getting to know the children of the generational families at camp. He spent his summers up north, first as a child, then a camper, a counselor and an activity instructor. He finished high school, went to college and upon graduation, began working for the city—then village—of Edina, but within three years he was lured back to the camp lifestyle.

Sam knew it was time to choose a path. With the then-camp directors ready to retire, he grabbed hold of the position and officially took charge of what would become the family’s legacy. “When you grow up in the camp experience, it’s just kind of in your blood,” he says.

Sam and his wife, Mary Jo Cote, rented out their Edina house each season and made the trek up north. From May 15 to September, their life and continues to revolve around the camp. They have not made the journey alone though. Sam is executive director of the camp and Bill Jones, another Edina resident, has worked by his side supervising operations since 1970, when he became a full-time director.

Together, they are grooming the next generation of leadership. Sam’s son Ruggs took on the role of director in 1997. Now he and his wife, Nancy, are beginning to walk the tightrope of parent-child rules while at camp. Their oldest son, Christian, shies away from his parents while attending camp, saying the other kids do not have contact with their mom and dad, so it’s not fair for him to spend time with his parents while camp is in session.

Ruggs works with his college floor mate and camp director Andre’ Brewer in running the boy’s camp. Laura Nolan is director of Camp Lake Hubert (along with assistant director Niki Kolb). Ruggs, too, progressed through the camp as a child, working in the kitchen alongside his siblings when he was old enough. He became an assistant counselor in high school and came back as a counselor during college.

Ruggs’s love of the camp experience led his friend Andre’ Brewer up north during his freshman year of college. He started working full time at the camp in 2000 as assistant director, and in 2001 Ruggs and Brewer, who’s originally from Kentucky, split the camp directorship.

“For me, it’s so much about the community you get at camp,” Ruggs says.

*Alumni of Camp Lincoln and Camp Lake Hubert are invited to attend the 100th anniversary celebration this fall. Families and friends are invited back to camp to join in weekend-long fun September 4-7. For more information, visit [lincoln-lakehubert.com/100years\\_info.php](http://lincoln-lakehubert.com/100years_info.php).*