



(RE)CREATING SPACES

Ideas for new spaces, improved places and saving money



When it comes to your property, there are always opportunities to create new spaces, improve existing spaces and get creative with materials. Whether you're recreating or starting from scratch, here are several ideas that may inspire you and save you money as you strive to serve your guests well. ▶

Ninja course



Photo courtesy of Word of Life Fellowship

Remote-control vehicle racetrack



Photo courtesy of Word of Life Fellowship

Recreational Spaces

Several camps have added new, unique programming elements to their facilities that engage campers on a variety of levels.

Word of Life Fellowship (Schroon Lake, New York) built two identical “ninja courses,” one at their Florida camp and one at their New York location. The courses are made of pressure-treated wood and they have seven elements, including monkey bars and a climbing wall. “We wanted the course to be something the campers could do unsupervised,” director of ministries Rich Andrews says.

Another unique outdoor activity at Word of Life is their remote-control racetrack. “We wanted an activity that everyone could do,” Andrews says. The track is 100-feet long and 50-feet wide. Volunteers laid down a 4-inch deep base of crushed asphalt and covered that with red clay. The track dividers are 4-inch corrugated plastic pipe. “Any camp on any budget can pull this off,” Andrews explains. “The bulk of the cost is in the remote-control trucks we bought to race on the track. We use Traxxas brand, and they are designed for this kind of track.”

The campers love the remote-control racetrack. “The kids started bringing their own RC cars to camp with them,” Andrews adds. “It’s a huge hit for not a lot of cost.”

“We want kids to do things at camp that they can’t do at home,” Andrews says. “Our activities are tools to help break down walls so we can minister to the kids.” ▶

The campers love the remote-control racetrack. “The kids started bringing their own RC cars to camp with them,” Word of Life director of ministries Rich Andrews adds. “It’s a huge hit for not a lot of cost.”

At Ponderosa Retreat and Conference Center (Larkspur, Colorado), director Marcus Rawls explains that he was looking to create an outdoor recreation activity that would serve them well during summer and winter retreats, especially when there is no snow for other activities. He and his team created a giant human foosball game using repurposed materials; spending far less than if they bought everything new (which we'll get to later in this article). They launched the new activity in winter 2018, and it's been a hit with campers.

At Lakeview Ministries Camp (Seymour, Indiana), program director Ellie Lutz shares about the permanent slip-n-slide they built into the side of a hill at their camp. "It's definitely one of our most popular activities at camp. Counselors love to create challenges for campers to do as they go down the slide, like going backward, singing a song all the way through before they reach the bottom, etc." ▶



Giant human foosball game



Photo courtesy of Ponderosa Retreat and Conference Center



Photo courtesy of Lakeview Ministries Camp

“The wheelchairs would get stuck in the mud, so we [applied for a] grant from the Children’s Charity Fund and Tomball Regional Health Foundation and were able to purchase three off-road wheelchairs,” director Glen Elder says.



Zipline pulley system

Photo courtesy of Camp Blessing



Off-road wheelchair

Photo courtesy of Camp Blessing

Accessible Places

Creating a camp or conference center that is ADA compliant and provides accessibility to campers or guests with special needs is a tall order, but not insurmountable. While some camps are designed and built to serve special needs guests exclusively, others are working on retrofitting facilities and outdoor spaces to make their camp more inclusive.

Camp Blessing Texas (Brenham, Texas) serves people with special needs. For 12 summers they rented camp facilities before purchasing their camp two years ago. “We modified the camps we rented to suit our needs,” director Glen Elder, says. “One summer, we rented a camp that had a zipline, and we designed a pulley system to get the kids to the top.”

When they purchased their camp, it was not ADA-friendly, so they’ve made many adaptations to it. “We’ve built four new cabins for campers and a clinic that are all wheelchair accessible,” Elder explains.

One of the biggest challenges Camp Blessing Texas faced while renting facilities was pathways to get kids in wheelchairs around the camp. “The wheelchairs would get stuck in the mud, so we [applied for a] grant from the Children’s Charity Fund and Tomball Regional Health Foundation and were able to purchase three off-road wheelchairs,” director Glen Elder says.

When they purchased their facility, they laid crushed granite pathways around the camp. “Crushed granite is a hard surface, so the wheelchairs roll over it smoothly, but it looks like a trail, rather than a sidewalk,” Elder explains. “It helps our camp maintain its country feel.” (Elder cautions that when using crushed granite paths, make sure to have good culverts for drainage so they don’t wash out.)

Wheelchair access is a common problem camps face. Lone Tree Camps (Capitan, New Mexico) adapted one of its facilities to make it more ADA-friendly. To address the need for paths for the wheelchairs, the camp borrowed some rubber horse mats. “The mats clip to one another and form a hard path for the wheelchairs to roll on,” director Charlene Worrell says. “These mats make transporting the kids in wheelchairs possible, so we didn’t have to build pathways.”

For the last four years, Joni and Friends has spent one week of the summer at Lone Tree’s camp (this year it’ll be two weeks). Worrell and her staff looked for ways to adapt their camp. “Our cabins were 38 years old, so we remodeled three of them to make them more accessible,” Worrell explains.

Camp Blessing and Lone Tree Camps are constantly looking for ways to adapt their facilities to make them more inclusive. “We rent a wheelchair lift so everyone can enjoy our zipline and our water slide,” Worrell says. “We sometimes use golf carts to transport people who have limited mobility.”

Worrell says that making her camp more ADA-friendly has other benefits too. “Doing this makes our camp more accessible for older people as well,” she adds.

Elder stresses that making a camp more ADA-friendly is doable in any facility. “If you have decent paths and accessible cabins, you can do it,” he offers. “It doesn’t require a complete retrofit. You just make it work, so everyone is included.”

But Worrell does have a word of caution about the cost involved. “Be sure to do your research to see what’s truly needed,” she explains. “Remember that everything is more expensive. Just do a little bit at a time, and God will provide the means.”

Handi*Vangelism Ministries International (H*VMI) is building their ADA-friendly camp from scratch. “We found that the expense of retrofitting a typical building as compared to buying a piece of land and building from scratch were very close,” executive director Kyle Robinson says. “We decided to go the ‘blank land’ direction and have purchased a 16-acre former golf course on which to build.”

Robinson recommends trying to imagine the needs of someone in a wheelchair and problem-solve ways to help them be more independent. “We can lower countertops, install automatic doors with sensors or push-button openings, lay paved pathways, build sleeping quarters with enough room for transfers from a wheelchair to the bed, plus room for storing and charging the wheelchairs at night,” he explains. “It’s a good idea to reinforce doors with kick plates to prevent damage. Also, use vertical, level or paddle-style door handles instead of round knobs.”

In deciding where to start when making adaptations, Robinson advises asking families what they need. “Families who have children with disabilities know what they need,” he says. “Once a camp identifies people that they want to serve, ask those families some questions and bring them to the facility. They will be your most valuable resource.”

H*VMI is a training ministry. “We have traveled all over the world to train camps and churches on how to serve people with disabilities,” Robinson explains. “We would happily help any camp who desires to serve people with disabilities look at their facility and design a program.” For more information, see www.hvmi.org.

Grants and federal tax incentives are available to help make your camp more ADA compliant. State, federal and private grants are available if you’re willing to do the work searching and applying for them. Elder has no special wisdom for grant writing, explaining that it’s a “tough job” and that most will say no. But when they say yes, it’s a big win, worth the work put into applying.

The website www.grantgopher.com allows you to search for grants for free (and offers more results and resources for a low monthly fee). You can also learn more about tax incentives at www.ccca.org/go/adata. ▶

Human foosball using repurposed materials



Photo courtesy of Ponderosa Retreat and Conference Center



Artificial turf

Photo courtesy of Glorieta Camps

Used artificial turf will soon find new life at Glorieta Camps (Glorieta, New Mexico) as they build a four-season tubing hill. The camp already puts the artificial turf to use all over the camp, helping with erosion and mud control, since the high-desert climate in New Mexico doesn't allow for natural grass to grow easily.

Used or Repurposed Materials

You don't always have to start from scratch or buy brand-new when updating or creating spaces at your camp or conference center. There are several places you can look online to find used or discarded items that you can use as-is, or reimagine for another purpose.

Rawls purchased all the materials for Ponderosa's human foosball from repurposedMATERIALS (RM), based in Denver, Colorado. He was able to procure used guardrail timbers for the posts, old gym bleacher boards for the kick plate around the court, ski netting for the border and climbing rope for each row of players. "I had seen human foosball before," Rawls explains, "but I didn't want to spend the money to build it from scratch."

Rawls already knew about repurposedMATERIALS because he and RM's founder had a mutual college friend. Rawls was intrigued by the possibilities that could be found at RM. "You never know what people have or where it will fit into the jigsaw puzzle. It struck my curiosity," Rawls says.

repurposedMATERIALS began when founder and president Damon Carson, who used to work in sanitation, realized that industries threw away countless items that were no longer of use to them, but could be put to use by someone else in a completely new way. Referring to his company as an "industrial thrift store," Carson explains that RM looks for "generic, versatile and adaptable materials that are being discarded by the primary industry and can get a very different second life in an unrelated industry." He says that RM makes the materials available, but that "the ingenious, innovative, resourceful" customers come up with new uses for the items.

The first thing Ponderosa started using from repurposedMATERIALS was used conveyer belt material in place of a cutting edge on the bottom of snowplows. "Snowplow blades dig into the road, so conveyer belt material trimming (which is 8 to 10 inches wide) is stiff enough that it will push the snow great," Rawls shares, "but it's pliable enough that it'll float over the roads and not be as hard on our roads and equipment all around." Rawls says they replace the belts several times a season, but at a significantly lower cost than replacing snowplow blades or repairing roads. He says they simply bolt the conveyer belt material on like you would a standard cutting blade on the bottom of the plow. ▶

“We try to be creative with something someone else might not have a purpose for, and we can give it a new life.”
Glorieta purchased an old bowling alley and used it to make a 20-foot table that has become a great conversation starter.

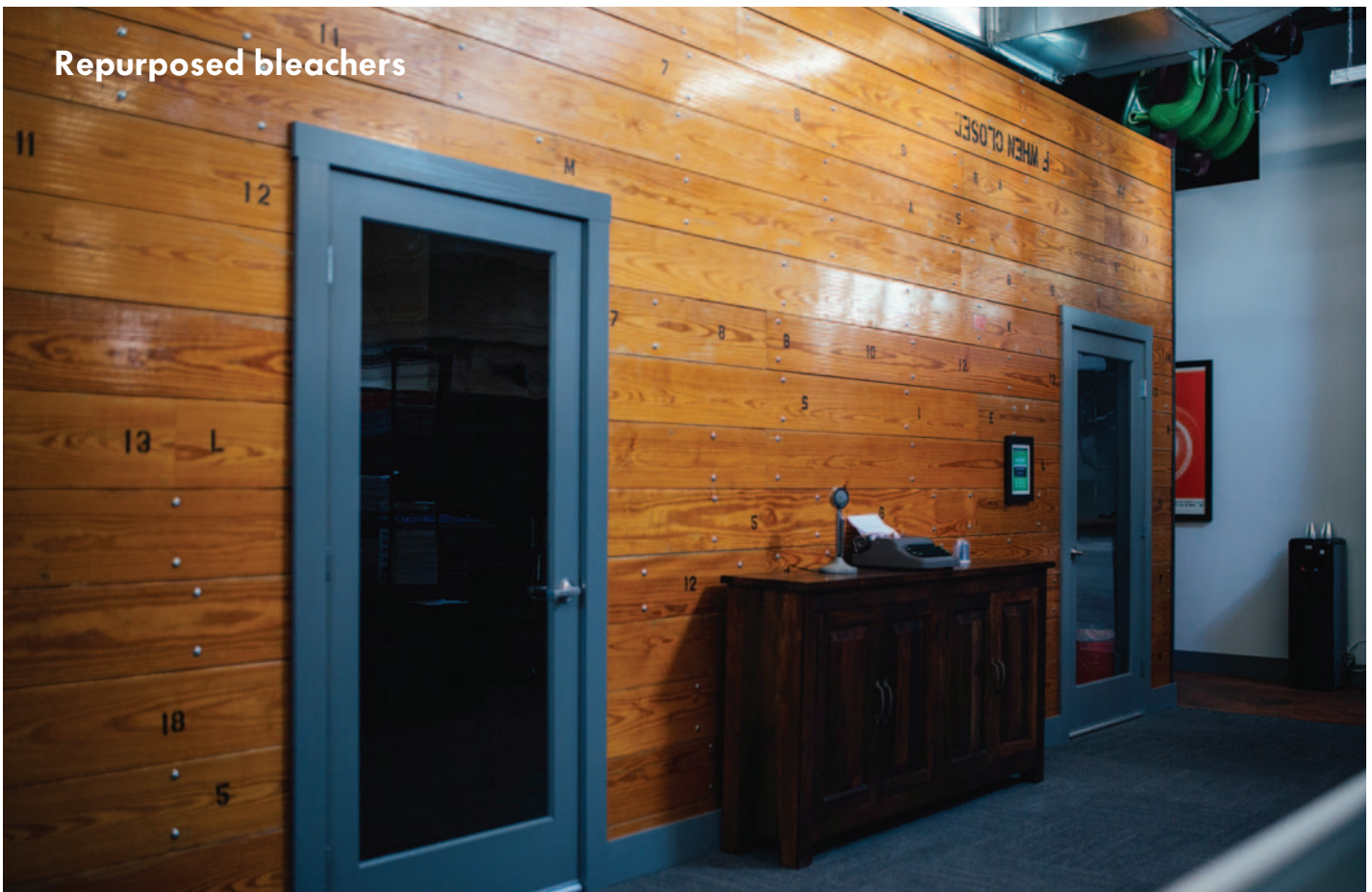


Table using repurposed bowling lanes

Used artificial turf from RM will soon find new life at Glorieta Camps (Glorieta, New Mexico) as they build a four-season tubing hill. The camp already puts the artificial turf to use all over the camp, helping with erosion and mud control, since the high-desert climate in New Mexico doesn't allow for natural grass to grow easily. Operations director Jon Malvig says the camp is also building a tunnel slide out of used PVC pipe.

Malvig explains, "We try to be creative with something someone else might not have a purpose for, and we can give it a new life." Glorieta purchased an old bowling alley from RM and used it to make a 20-foot table that has become a great conversation starter.

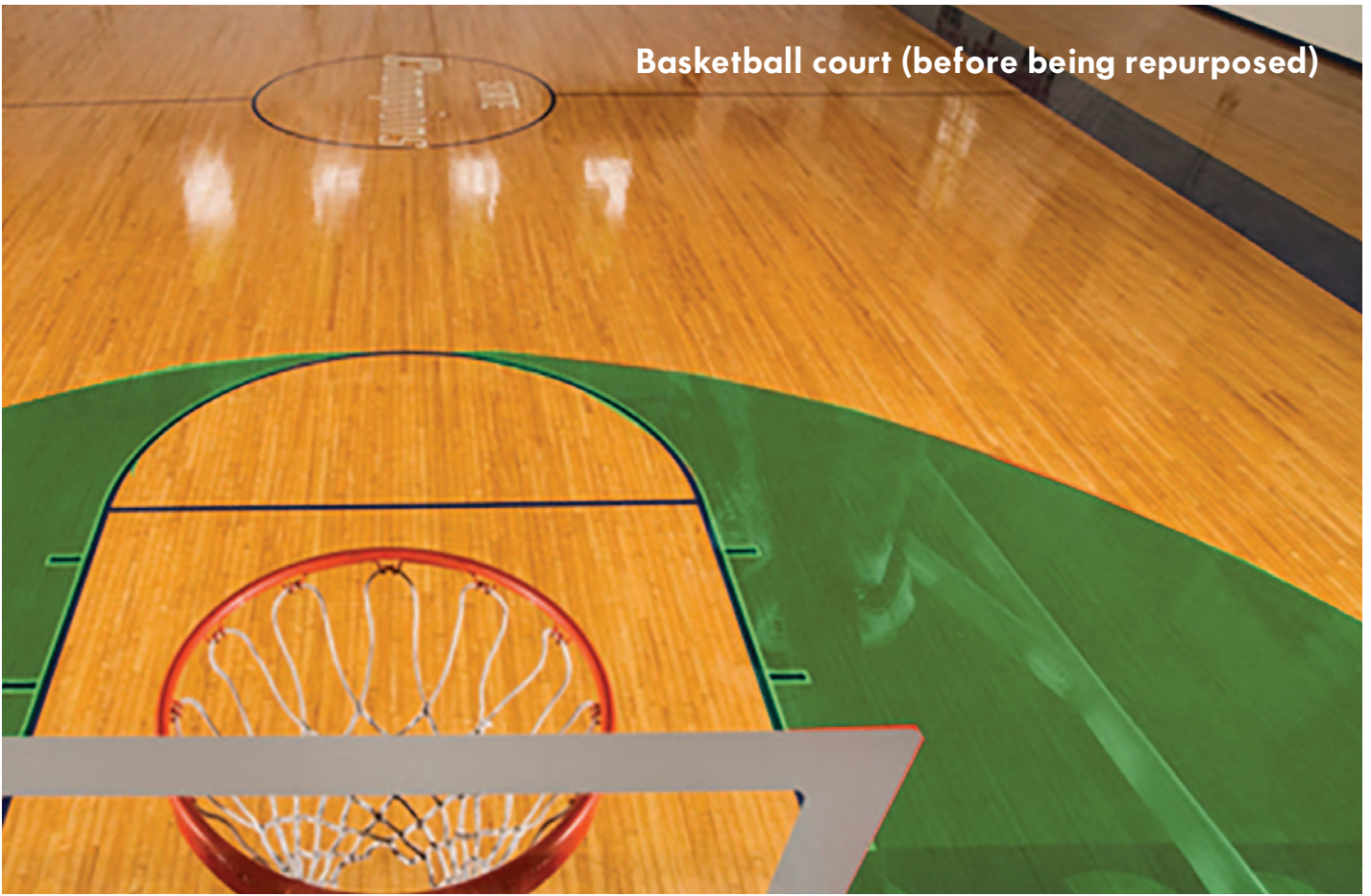
The possibilities for finding new uses for old materials are endless. Old fire hose can be used to create a bumper around a pier or dock; metal barrels can become creative seating areas, old billboard vinyl can become a slip-n-slide or an outdoor theater screen, plastic pallets can be transformed into a dock. ▶



Repurposed bleachers

Photo courtesy of repurposedMATERIALS

Basketball court (before being repurposed)



Basketball court (after being repurposed)



Photo courtesy of repurposedMATERIALS

Photo courtesy of repurposedMATERIALS



An old billboard can be used to create a slip-n-slide or an outdoor theater screen.

RM has made it easy to search their entire inventory and order online at www.repurposedmaterialsinc.com. Or if you're near one of their five warehouses, you can wander the aisles and get ideas on how you can repurpose items to serve your needs.

Another place to look for used or discarded items is through hotel liquidation websites. There you can find furniture, lighting, dishes, appliances and much more. Search online for "hotel liquidation," and you'll find several sites.

Sometimes it just takes an attentive eye to find items that can be purchased used for a great price. Take, for example, Lone Tree Camps. According to director Charlene Worrell, they have acquired two discarded waterslides (that story was featured in the April/May 2018 issue of *InSite*) and more recently purchased three old train cars.

"My husband and I were traveling, and we found them, purchased them cheaply and had them shipped to our camp," Worrell explains. They renovated the train cars and use two of them as cabins. The third train car, a caboose, serves as the camp's snack bar.

"My husband was a visionary," Worrell shares, "always finding treasure in another's trash." ■



Diane Stark lives in Indiana with her husband and their five children. Her writing has been published in Guideposts, Outreach, War Cry, and about 40 Chicken Soup for the Soul books. She loves to write about the important things in life: her family and her faith.



Jen Howver was once a camp kid who later spent two summers working at a camp in Michigan, where she met and later married her husband, Jay. Fast forward more than 20 years and now Jen works as a marketing consultant and editor of InSite magazine. She and Jay live in Monument, Colorado, with their daughters, Noelle and Chloe, and way too many pets.