

Whether You Call Them Millenials Or Echo Boomers or Just Plain Spoiled, Get Ready Because They're Coming

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The Millenials, people born between 1981 and 2001, will entirely recast the image of youth from downbeat and alienated to upbeat and engaged with potentially big consequences for America as they grow up and come to work.

Marcia Galvin, human resource director and function coordinator for Normandy Farms Family Campground, Foxboro, Mass., explained what these "Echo Boomers" or "Gen Yers" mean to the camping industry in a presentation at the Northeast Conference on Camping earlier this year in Springfield, Mass.

"They are our children or grandchildren and our employees," said Galvin. "They're anyone who falls between the age of 4 and 24 years old. To get to know who they are as a generation will be helpful for us not only as campground owners as how we treat our employees but also as parents and grandparents and how our children see things as they're growing up on the campground."

"The Millenials are more numerous, more affluent, better educated and more diverse" than all previous generations, she said. "There is a new focus on teamwork, achievement, modesty and good conduct."

Taking a closer look at this up-and-coming slice of American society, the so-called Millenials number about 73 million, about 26% of the U.S. population, and are the most technically savvy, ethnically diverse generation, possessing a distinctively practical world view — optimistic, social, civic-minded and highly moral. Because of the impending retirement of millions of Baby Boomers, Galvin explained, the Millenials will face lower unemploy-

ment rates, but also the need for more education to get a job and more competition when they look for a job.

In terms of ethnicity, the Millenials are the most ethnically diverse generation yet, she continued. One out of three is not Caucasian and nine out of 10 children under the age of 12 have friends of different ethnicity than their own.

Millenials have access to money. One in nine high schoolers has a credit card co-signed by a parent. Teenagers have an average of \$100 a week in disposable income, and 40% of the nation's teenagers hold at least a part-time job.

One in four Millenials lives in a single-parent household, and three out of four have a working mother.

Millenials are "connected" in that they seem to be less cynical and more concerned regarding social issues than Generation X, she said. Between 75% and 90% of the teenagers have a computer at home and 50% have access to the Internet from home.

Further, Galvin said studies show that Millenials prefer directness over subtlety, action over observation and cool over all else. "They are very heavily influenced by their peers and brand names," she said. "They are particularly susceptible to what brands their peers like or do not like."

Going Deeper into the Psyche Of Up-And-Coming Millenials?

Going deeper into the psyche of this generation, which provides much of the seasonal help at campgrounds around the country and will comprise the next generation of adult campers, Galvin told the NCA conference attendees that Millenials are:

Optimists. Nine out of 10 teens describe themselves as "happy," "confident" and "positive." A rapidly increasing number say that growing up today is easier than it was for their parents. Teen suicide rates are now falling for

the first time in decades.

Team players. Millenials are more focused on group activities. When asked what in their view is the major cause of problems in our society, they answer "selfishness." Says Galvin: "By a huge 10-1 majority, they believe it's their generation and not their parents that will do more to help the environment over the next 25 years."

Smarter than most people think. Aptitude test scores have risen in every racial and ethnic group, especially in elementary schools, and eight out of 10 teens feel "it's cool to be smart" while a record share of teens taking advanced placement tests say they look forward to school and plan on attending college.

Believers in the future who think of themselves as cutting edge. Teens rank "scientists" and "young people" as two groups that will cause "most changes for the better in the future."

Accepting of Authority. Most teens identify with their parents' values and over nine out of 10 say they "trust" and "feel close to" their parents.

The most watched over generation in history. From 1981 to 1997, according to researchers at the University of Michigan, "free" or "unsupervised" time in the typical pre-teen's day has shrunk by 37%.

How do you spot a Millenial? Galvin suggested that as Little League players, they are likely to treat umpires with more respect than do their parents; as middle schoolers, they are already designing websites for their parents' businesses; they are volunteers at the library because most colleges today look at community service as part of something they have to do to get into college; and as young bike riders, they wear helmets, even though their parents don't.

"America has grown 'kid-fixated,'" Galvin said. "More money is being spent on the Millenial generation than any other previous generation. Kids are buying more things jointly with their parents and influencing more parental buying decisions."

They're easily entertained by interactive gaming, be it iPods, computers, extreme sports, cell phones and e-mail and chat rooms.

More Real and Perceived Health Risks Experienced

Millenials, in Galvin's view, face more health risks than older generations. It is estimated that 3-5% of school-age kids are now diagnosed with Attention Deficit Disorder or its hyperactive variant ADHD. Three million Millenial kids, roughly 80% of them boys, are known to take the drug Ritalin for this disorder.

The risk of asthma has skyrocketed for the Millenials. From 1980 to 1994, the reported rate for asthma among children under age 4 rose by 160%; and among children aged 5-14, by 75%.

Obesity now plagues almost 14% of all children. "Many of these kids also have elevated cholesterol, high blood pressure, type-2 diabetes and other heart-disease risk factors that are associated with excessive weight," she said.

Why? "All have been directly linked to the more structured, regimented and indoor lifestyle of today's children and teens, a lifestyle that results in less free play at recess, less exercise and more organized outdoor activities," she said.

Millenials have strong family ties, according to Galvin. In a *Time* magazine survey in 1999 of 12- to 14-year-olds, 79% answered "my parents" when asked of all the people they know or know about, who do they look up to the most. "Millenial children are being raised in many different types of environments," Galvin said. "They may live with both parents, one parent, switch from Mom's to Dad's to grandparents. However, they are nurtured, loved, cared for and protected more than past generational children."



Marcia Galvin

What the "Kids" are Saying

In her presentation, Galvin shared the results of 800 questionnaires she sent out to the "Millennial" children of campground owning members of the Northeast Camping Association. Among their perceptions, which tend to reflect their views of the campground business:

- Guests' favorite pastime at a campground is hanging out around a campfire, with toasting marshmallows and reading coming in second and third.
- Adults' favorite pastime is "family stuff," bonding with their kids, followed by relaxing and sightseeing.
- Kids' favorite activity at a campground is playing on the playground, followed by swimming and riding bikes.
- The busiest day of the season is

July 4, followed by Memorial Day and Labor Day.

- The most popular campground store item: Regular food, followed by candy and souvenirs.
- The best part of owning a campground is meeting people, followed by meeting friendly people and having winters off.
- The hardest part of owning a campground is employee issues, followed by grounds upkeep and setting a good example.
- The most common rule broken at a campground is running and diving into the pool, followed by violation of quiet hours and speeding.
- The most popular form of entertainment at the campground is the swimming pool, followed by music and bingo. ♦

They are getting more supervision, spending more time with their parents, still doing things with their families and still receiving discipline from their parents, although it's being done differently.

Millenials are spending more time with their parents because of flex-hours, and with their grandparents, who are taking on more of a parenting role for this generation because of increased divorce rates and times of war, she said. More Millenials grew up in child care than any previous generation.

Millenials, meanwhile, bring many positives to the work force. "We have them as our children but we also have them as our employees working in the store for us, working at the pool or the

beach and how are they going to fit in?" she asked, in suggesting that RV park and campground operators ask themselves several questions as they deal with Millenials as employees at their facilities: (1) Where do our employees tend to come from and where are we more likely to get them? (2) How can we attract them, knowing what types of people the Millenials are and what qualities they have that best fit our business sector? (3) What kind of experience and environment are they looking for? "Probably something very structured because that's what they're coming from," she suggested. (4) What kind of perks can we offer that will make them stick with us? (5) How best can we

reward them?

What do Millenials want most from a job? Galvin suggested that they want to work with positive people, be challenged, be treated respectfully, learn new skills, work in friendly environments, have flexible schedules and be paid well.

As human resource director and function coordinator for Normandy Farms Family Campground, Marcia Galvin is responsible for hiring, training, payroll, scheduling and park function coordination at her well known park. She holds a bachelor's degree in education from Fitchburg State College, taught elementary school for 10 years and is a disc jockey for private functions. Steve Bibler ♦