



## Local KOA Lets You Get Away Without Leaving Town

By Melissa James, York County Contributor

Imagine you've just traveled into nature, ready for a weekend of camping (or glamping!). Everywhere you turn, dense trees tower overhead. Yet just around the bend, your kids can go wild on a jumping pillow, cool off in the pool and splash pad, or take in an outdoor movie. Now imagine this getaway isn't "away" at all!

If you're like many York County residents, you didn't know a huge campground was only minutes from your front door. While local families often plan staycations at places like Great Wolf Lodge, they're also starting to take notice of the York County Williamsburg KOA Campground... a hidden gem tourists have frequented for more than 45 years.



"Local people don't realize we're here," said Donna Fout, who co-owns the business with husband Gary. "You don't have to go far to get away. If your kid's in soccer and can't miss a game, you can come here and still make the game! Churches and schools like to come here in groups for retreats."



Three generations of Donna's family have worked for the business. Her parents purchased the small, remote campground back in 1971, and Donna took over the business that same decade. In 1997, they acquired a neighboring campground, expanding the business from 60 to 370 sites. Williamsburg KOA now spans 180 beautiful wooded acres, 100 of which remain untouched.

Donna and Gary raised their three children in a house across the street, but recently moved to a neighborhood nearby. Their daughters live in York County—which gives the Fouts plenty of time with their five grandchildren - and their son resides in the Outer Banks.

Kendall is also part of the staff, managing the family's side business, Great American Direct—which designs and sells campground mattresses, sleeper sofas and outdoor items such as benches and waste receptacles. This newer business began 10 years ago, when a mattress designer was touring one of their cabins and asked Donna why it didn't have a better mattress. \

"He said he would design a mattress for us, and he works with all the big companies," she said. "I started selling them to some of my friends, then to all the KOA campgrounds. KOA was on the show 'Undercover Boss,' and [CEO] Jim Rogers said, 'Don't stop selling mattresses! People don't think about the INDOOR comfort at the campgrounds.'"

"I specialize in small spaces. We design things that fit and cater to the outdoor industry. It's not the same as a hotel. I test everything here at the





campground; we put them in units and wait for customers' feedback. We look at the quality and the wear and tear, and when it passes our test, we add it to our line."

Suffice it to say, if you stay in one of Williamsburg KOA's 43 cabins, 17 lodges, or two yurts, you'll be sleeping on a comfortable mattress! You also can find their outdoor seating lines in various gathering spaces and patios throughout the campground. Of course, if you own a camper or prefer the rustic experience of a tent, they offer many sites for each. No matter which lodging you choose, you'll have access to the campground's vast amenities and

activities that keep families coming back.

From wagon rides and Halloween weekends in October, to summer ice cream socials, to bringing in petting zoos, to offering bike rentals and disc golf, the Fouts make sure there's always something to do at Williamsburg KOA. But some like to come and do nothing at all!

"I think it's the personality and the size of the campground it has a certain charm about it. Our staff give fantastic service and really caters to the campers. Go check Trip Advisor—we just got the Certificate of Excellence Hall of Fame for five consecutive years of top ratings," said Donna.

The campground is also a perennial KOA Founder's Award winner for its quality and excellence, and this year became an official Wildlife Habitat, which certifies that they provide a welcoming haven for local wildlife. KOA Williamsburg additionally serves the human community, raising money for KOA Care Camps (for children with cancer) and volunteering Kendall's time for equine therapy to children with disabilities. Everything about the business is focused on families and a sense of community, both people-nature and people-people.



"We're like the last small town in America," said Donna. "You come and park beside someone, knock on their door, have campfire with them, and the kids go play together. You would never do that at a hotel. People these days are very overdone and stressed out—but when they pull into our driveway, they have that look of 'we're finally here' and they get to reconnect with family and disconnect with their regular life."

The campground continues to gain recognition, in part due to a stronger web presence. Donna took advantage of York County's Google Street View for Business Grant, which helps your business get listed or update your Google business listing and further enhance your listing by having an interior virtual tour posted online. She also turned to the Office of Economic Development for help launching the Great American Direct mattress and furniture business.

"York County is a beautiful place to live and grow a family," she said. "It really is! We have a beautiful village, history, art, and the water. It's why people want to visit here—it's a great vacation spot."



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<https://koa.com/campgrounds/williamsburg/>