

# Living on the Lake<sup>®</sup>

Wisconsin's Northwoods Lifestyle Magazine

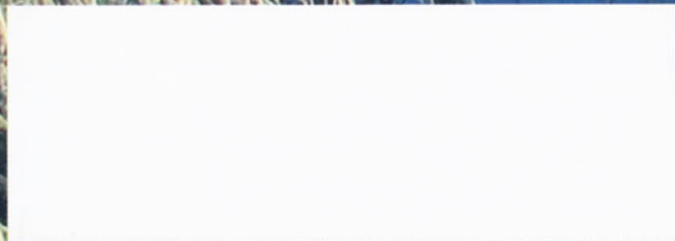
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## *Fears about* **Phosphorus**

## **Bent's Camp**

*Where the past lives on*



# Northwoods Past *still echoes at*

By Timi Eckes

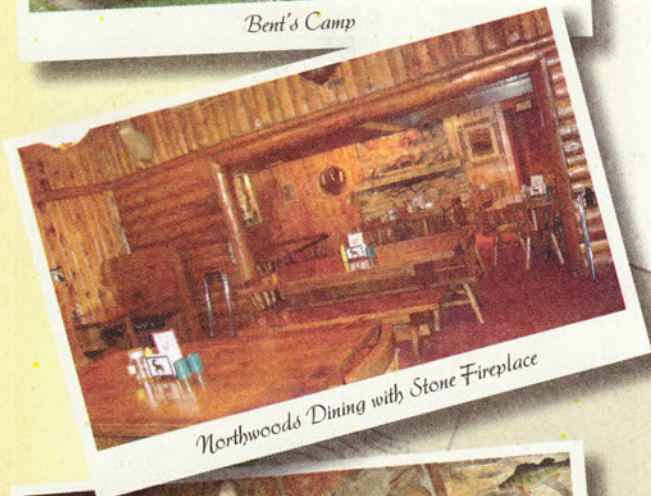


# Bent's Camp

Photos on this page by Timi Eckes



*Bent's Camp*



*Northwoods Dining with Stone Fireplace*



*Paul and Lisa Stemen*

With palatial homes and condominiums springing up along shorelines in ever-increasing numbers, the face of the Northwoods has changed forever. Luckily, a piece of the past can still be found at Bent's Camp near Land O'Lakes. The resort has been a fixture in the area for more than a century, serving generations of vacationers and locals. A working resort that old is a rarity, and in an age of unprecedented lakefront development, its very existence could be called a miracle.

Fortunately for Bent's Camp and those who cherish it, Lisa and Paul Stemen, the present owners, recognize the value of their historic resort. They've carried on the work of Lisa's parents, Ray and Carol Peterson, who owned it previously.

But the whole thing started with Charles Bent and his family. Enamored with the beauty of the area, Bent built his resort on the Cisco Chain back in 1896 to accommodate hunters and anglers.

The lodge restaurant followed in 1906.

The Bents housed their guests in rustic cabins on the property and served them home-cooked meals, including vegetables from their own garden. But in later years, the property began to deteriorate. The cab-

ins sank into a state of disrepair and eventually, the lodge sat empty.

In 1990, Ray and Carol Peterson bought the resort and began the task of rescuing it from the ravages of time. The Petersons set about repairing the cabins and expanding the lodge. They raised its ceiling and blended the old and new portions of the building so successfully that most people don't realize where the old portion ends and the new begins. The Petersons' hard work paid off: Bent's Camp once again thrived under their care, and families continued to make the place part of their vacation and dining traditions.

But the old camp was soon to see more transformations. In May 2003, Lisa and Paul bought the property. Both of them had been working at the resort and they realized it was time to make a change in their lives. "We were around 40 and decided that we needed to either buy it or find something else to do," Paul recalls as he and Lisa relax in a booth in the lodge's dining room.

When they took over, Paul and Lisa put their own touches on the resort by adding air conditioning, generators and a gift shop in the lodge's upper level. "The gift shop has really taken off," Lisa notes. She enjoys running the shop, and it's obvious in the variety of clothing, souvenirs, works by local artists and much more.

As Lisa gives a tour of the building, she points out features that are holdovers from the resort's early years, testimony to the respect for tradition found here. An extensive photo display reminds visitors of the resort's long history. The unique, rustic décor features birch bark that lines the lodge's ceiling, evoking an era when the Northwoods was a sparsely populated sportsman's paradise.

Photos on this page courtesy of Lisa and Paul Stemen, and the Bent family.





*Relaxing Waterfront Views of Cisco Chain*

As they have for more than a century, the 10 cabins rest along the shore of Mamie Lake, promising happy vacation memories within their walls. Inside the lodge, patrons chat and enjoy sweeping views of the lake.

Along with its historic background, Bent's Camp is also known for its food. Lisa and Paul added their own touches to the menu when they bought the business. The fish fry has such an excellent reputation in the area that diners may end up waiting a bit if they don't get there early enough. That doesn't seem to faze anyone, though, as people keep returning. Along with perennial favorites like walleye and prime rib, the menu lists unique offerings, as well as a wide variety of pizzas and sandwiches. And while she no longer shoulders the responsibility of owning Bent's Camp, Carol Peterson remains an important part of it: She

still makes the desserts enjoyed by so many customers.

The resort has a loyal following among both patrons and employees. Lisa enjoys seeing that many of the customers who vacation there now first came as kids with their parents. Another unique aspect of the resort is the length of time that some of Lisa and Paul's employees have been there. "We're really lucky to have the group that works here," Lisa says, noting that the employees help to make Bent's Camp the treasured place that it is.

Another reason the resort is so popular is the Stemens' involvement in the Land O'Lakes community. They offer Bent's Camp as a location for many local fundraisers, such as the Land O'Lakes Historical Society and the Cisco Chain Riparian Association. They also host NorthWoodstock, an all-day outdoor concert featuring music from the '60s and '70s. Lisa and Paul also help the community celebrate New Year's Eve, Saint Patrick's Day and other holidays by throwing parties at the lodge.

Finally, Lisa and Paul's customers feel they matter to the owners, the employees and the other patrons. "They like to be recognized," Paul says. "It's kind of like on 'Cheers,' when they come in and everybody in here knows them."

It's clear that this historic old resort has ended up in the right hands. With hard work and dedication to their customers and the community, Lisa and Paul have maintained the tradition of hospitality begun by Charles Bent so long ago. Mr. Bent would undoubtedly be pleased.

**"It's kind of like on 'Cheers,' when they come in and everybody in here knows them."**

**-Paul Stemen**

*Photos on this page by Timi Eckes*



*Bent's Camp Cabin*



*Docks of Bent's Camp*