

Welcome to the inaugural issue of the COLA eNewsletter, **Short Ears, Long Tales**. **Short Ears, Long Tales** will provide monthly articles ranging from historic tales about Lac Courte Oreilles, introductions to helpful volunteers and organizations aligned with COLA, water-quality updates, LCO tribal, state and local government actions affecting the Upper Couderay River watershed, and more. Please let us know what you think about this effort to better communicate with our COLA membership.

Former restaurants part of lake's legend

By Kathy Hanson
Contributing Writer

There are as many stories of old-fashioned supper clubs and restaurants on the shores of Lac Courte Oreilles as there are fish stories. Many of them were built and experienced their zenith in the golden age of the 1950s and 60s. So many are now gone, and it is difficult to find first-person testimony to their glory. Others changed hands and continued to be operated well into the 80s and 90s, thanks to entrepreneurs and lovers of the Northwoods who—like restaurant owners today—poured their dollars, their hearts and their physical being into keeping traditions alive.

Two such restaurants—now closed—that once served up their memorable menus on the shores of Lac Courte Oreilles, still evoke the sweet, nostalgic and wistfulness of days gone by.

Thor's Kitchen

Originally constructed in 1897 as a private summer home by Dr. Oscar Bennett, the building was bought and turned into a resort in 1934 by Paul Becker. It was named Becker's Resort until sold to the Kersten family and renamed Holiday Haven.

In 1971 Art and Lea Moe bought the property and for the next 17 years, on the western end of of Lac Courte Oreilles, Thor's Kitchen reigned as only a Norse god of thunder might—with strength, reputation, meals worthy of a Nordic King—and all of it projecting out to the lake in a handcrafted Viking ship's prow. That open bow eventually became part of the restaurant itself, seating up to 300 people who congregated at Thor's regularly for spirits and food.

From an old, faded but still strikingly sumptuous-sounding menu (circa early 70s), in carefully scripted cursive handwriting, come these words:

"Thor's is a family owned and operated supper club overlooking beautiful Lac Courte Oreilles. Our theme is a Viking ship cocktail lounge with lots of glass overlooking the lake and our grounds cluttered with wood carvings. The exterior is covered with huge hand made shakes. Our motto is 'Excellence in Dining' with wife and daughter the main chefs. You will find white tablecloths with red napkins to touch on elegance.

The atmosphere is warm with rough cedar paneling, huge beams, fireplaces, carpeted floors, subdued lights and plenty of windows to enjoy the outdoor view."

Many generations of Lac Courte Oreille lake owners and visitors will remember that Art Moe was a skilled wood carver, chain saw artist and building contractor. He completed at least four major expansions to the restaurant and carved many animal figures that decorated the landscaping and grounds outside.

Legend has it that Art's wife Lea, who didn't set out to be a chef, quickly learned the skills, and according to a July 1981 story in The Wisconsin Restaurateur, Art credits her, " She's the one who made us famous."

Thor's Menu

The Moe's missed nothing in their offerings to people who loved food. "From the broiler" came rib eye steaks, New York strip, Filet and Baron of Beef (tenderloin filled with bleu cheese).

"From the waters of the good earth:" Torsk (served with butter), Orange Roughy from New Zealand, Viking Lobster from New Zealand, Alaskan King Crab, Gulf Shrimp and Canadian Walleye.

"Specialties of Thor's" were prime rib au jus, pork loin ribs, Chicken Kiev, pork chop, and a skillet of butter-sautéed mushrooms.

But the "piece de resistance"—and what is still talked about today, 44 years later—was Chef Lea's Flaming Duck, a one-half of a 5-pound duckling, glazed with Lea's famous orange sauce. (Price \$10.95) Garrison Keillor has also mentioned the dish on his popular Prairie Home Companion Show.

Jim Coors said his own recollections of Thor's Kitchen go back to the winter of 1983 when he and his wife, Ann Pollock, completed their first Birkebeiner and Ann's parents treated them to dinner at Thor's.

"When we arrived on the evening of the Birkie, the place was packed and very merry. We might have been the only Birkie skiers there, and we were treated grandly. Thor's was known for its duck dinners, which were accompanied by wild rice and cranberries."

Another Lac Courte Oreilles resident, Tom Burgess, said his first memory of Thor's was in 1974 when he was dating his wife Sue. They drove up from Fort Atkinson and stayed at the old Burgess cottage.

"You could go out to the foredeck of the Viking ship overlooking the lake, and gaze down in to the east end of the lake. We dined on orange duck. It was very special," Burgess said.

Fire

Thor's was destroyed in a pre-dawn blaze on Sunday, January 17, 1988.

The Sawyer County Record reported, "The fire started in the bar area, according to Moe and Stone Lake fire chief Robert Patko.

"The fire was discovered by the Moe's daughter Kristin, a winter employee who lives in a cottage on the lake bank below the restaurant. She was awakened about 4:30 a.m. by her dog, and tried to phone her parents, who live behind the restaurant. But the line was busy, since the phone line serving the bar and Moe's house had burned off, Mr. Moe said."

The building was in full flame and could not be saved. After the loss, customers from as far away as Chicago called to offer help, including many regular customers from Hayward, according to the story.

Memories

There are four Moe children: Sarah, Kristin, Dayna and David, all of whom worked there at various stages of their young adulthood, as did Sarah's husband Bruce, explained daughter Sarah.

"Our Mom and Dad created and operated a one-of-a-kind Norsk-themed supper club overlooking Lac Courte Oreilles, popular with northern Wisconsin visitors as well as the locals.... The relish tray may have been one of the first garden-to-table movements in the area, with vegetables grown in the Moe family garden, then served on the relish tray or (with) your favorite cocktails," Dayna said.

The Beach Club

The Beach Club is another legendary restaurant, originally built in the 70s as part of a multi-cabin resort by Dick Griner and called The Highlands Supper Club.

Terry and Pam Fairclough moved to the area from Sycamore, Illinois in 1995 and purchased the property in February, renaming it The Beach Club.

After major renovations (the restaurant was not in operation when they purchased it), including plumbing, electric, ceiling and flooring, the Fairclough's opened at the end of June 1995 and quickly established The Beach Club as a premier regional, fine-dining establishment.

Terry was the host/maitre 'd and Pam the bartender and supervisor of a staff of 12, including a full-time chef they brought in from Brainerd, a sous chef, a dishwasher, salad person, dessert person and various wait staff.

"There wasn't anything we both didn't do," said Pam. "I bused tables and washed dishes as needed," said Terry. They built an outdoor deck, a wraparound pine-top bar that seated 18, and they never looked back. They didn't have time. They were open six nights a week year-round. Sunday was a cleaning day for Terry and Pam did the books.

Named to "Great Wisconsin Restaurants"

Terry said the first year they attracted primarily lake people but by the second year they had captured the Hayward market. That year they were also named to the Northern Wisconsin section of the book, "Great Wisconsin Restaurants," which hailed their "extensive menu that deviates pleasantly from traditional North Woods fare. . . alligator Creole, Jamaican shrimp and duck strudel. Best of all is the list of entrees, which range from charbroiled chicken and steaks to lamb tenderloin with a Scotch whiskey sauce and walleye roasted in a crunchy nut crust."

The Fairclough's said they also served escargot, fresh oysters on the half shell, a huge Porterhouse steak, fresh Julienne sea bass transported from Minneapolis, and homemade desserts. They also introduced fresh, steamed vegetables to the area, which were enormously popular.

An impressive and diverse wine list brought many people in, and the 75 dinner seats were full night after night. They also became a destination for Christmas and holiday parties.

Tom and Sue Burgess frequented The Beach Club. Tom said, "It had a certain aura to it, not present in other restaurants—the setting sun and the spectacular view from a high point. It had a different appeal for people who liked to boat; it had extra dockage." Burgess said he liked their salmon and almond-crusted walleye.

Coors also thought The Beach Club's walleye was "fabulous," and the décor—hosts and servers in Hawaiian garb and giant tropical fans hung from the ceiling—were great for Wisconsin winters, he said.

"We were sad to see the owners move on," said Coors.

Sold

The Fairclough's are proud of what they accomplished with The Beach Club.

Pam said, "The achievement of taking something that was closed, operating it, making it a success and taking it to that level was wonderful."

Terry said, "We did it! Pride, achievement, and it helped us get to know the community.

When they listed the restaurant it sold in two months and continued to operate as a restaurant for seven years before it became a condominium development.

Today, Pam and Terry own and operate North Shore Promotional Advertising.

COLA Mission: 1) to protect, preserve and enhance the quality of Lac Courte Oreilles and Little Lac Courte Oreilles, their shorelands and surrounding areas, while respecting the interests of property owners and the rights of the general public; and 2) to consider, study, survey and respond to issues deemed relevant by COLA's membership.

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Kathy Hanson

COLA is very fortunate that Kathy is willing to contribute to our eNewsletter. She is well respected in the region for her reporting and writing skills.

Kathy is a free-lance reporter for the Sawyer County Gazette, the Sawyer County Field Editor for Our Wisconsin magazine, and Copy Editor for the Bayfield County Journal.

She has also served as Staff Reporter, Business Feature Writer, Columnist, and Copy Editor for the Sawyer County Record.

Why "Short Ears, ...?"

Lac Courte Oreilles, or Lake Short Ears, was the name used by the first French Traders who visited what was then known as Ottawa Lake. A local band of Ottawas observed the custom of cutting off a portion of their ears.

Tales of Lac Courte Oreilles

This book, edited by Tom and Sue Burgess, together with COLA's history committee, compiled a detailed history of Lac Courte Oreilles. The book is available from COLA and the Sherman & Ruth Weiss Community Library in Hayward.

UPCOMING EVENTS

COLA Annual Meeting

June 27, 2015
St. Francis Solanus Mission

8:30 am coffee and rolls
9-11 am meeting

COLA Annual Picnic

July 18, 2015
Bass Lake Town Hall
12-3 pm

LCO Foundation and COLA Charity Golf Tournament

August 15, 2015
Big Fish Golf Club
Registration 12 pm
Shotgun Start 1 pm
[Register Now!](#)

NOTICES

COLA Board of Directors

Guest Editorial
Sawyer Co. Record
[COLA board alarmed about proposed DNR budget cuts](#)

April 8, 2015

Are your neighbors and extended family members of COLA?

If not, please ask them to [join](#).

Support COLA by contributing to the Lac Courte Oreilles Foundation

COLA is looking for a communications consultant

Are you willing to help or do you know someone who might be interested?

[Contact COLA](#)