

A Tuftonboro summer haven is saved for future generations

BY ELISSA PAQUETTE
Staff Writer

TUFTONBORO — Rick and Lorraine Sager acquired some new and unexpected responsibilities in March, but the opportunity to save their yearly vacation spot along the shores of The Basin on Tuftonboro Neck from development was an opportunity too important to miss.

The memories of Rick's vacations since the age of five with family and friends, swimming, canoeing, water-skiing, and enjoying the run of the Sunset Lodge property kept the thought of preserving the area in his mind when 32-year-old Chris Fiske, its heir, came to Attorney Sager for legal advice regarding its sale.

Fiske's grandparents Charlie and Grace Rosell built an 18 by 20 foot one-and-a-half story house on the property in 1947 with wood milled from trees that blew down in the great hurricane of 1938. Six cabins in all followed, enough to house friends and family for summers filled with water sports and volleyball and Monday night cook-outs beside the hand-built stone fireplace in the pavilion.

They rented the cabins to visitors, who would often book them all for the same week every year and bring enough guests to fill them. At one point, says Sager, reservations had to be made as much as 10 years in advance.

That trend changed over time as rustic camps began to become a thing of the past and more met the fate of the wrecking ball to make room for luxurious mansions stretching across previously-wooded parcels. The Sagers are maintaining the simplicity of the one- and two-bedroom cabins outfitted with kitchen facilities and porches from which to gaze at the sun as it travels downward over the westward shore in spectacular fashion.

There are no TVs in the cabins, but visitors can enjoy wireless access to the outside world if they choose to bring a computer along on vacation.

As if on cue, a mother and her 20 year-old son come over to say good by. She smiles and says that her son has been coming to Sunset Lodges the same week every summer since he was just six weeks old. His sister's been coming since she was eight weeks old. It's a tradition they won't need to miss, now that the place is in the Sagers' hands.

Rick and Lorraine's son Wes, 23, and his wife, Victo-



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THE SAGERS, Rick and Lorraine and Victoria and Wes stop on the Sunset Lodges lakeside path bordering The Basin, in Tuftonboro. The establishment, which dates back to 1947, including the original cabins for rent, is now under their ownership and care.

ria, moved into the manager's house to handle reservations and tend to guests' needs. It's a great place to live, says Victoria, a native Californian. She much prefers the New Hampshire woodlands to the desert. Her husband agrees. After an academic stint in Morocco, he began to hunger for the cool, green forests of his childhood in Wakefield. He has a record of attendance that doesn't beat his father's considering the age difference, but it began when he "was in the womb."

Sitting at a picnic table beside the well-groomed sand volleyball court, Sager looks right at home. Sager says he was saddened when the young Fiske first came to him to ponder the distressing option of selling the family

property, despite his love for the place. He didn't consider buying it himself, but says "the pieces started falling into place" when it occurred to him that Fiske, who was interested in landscaping and running a nursery business, might find Sager's 56-acre parcel near his home in Wakefield appealing. "It has road frontage on Route 16," he says, certainly important for a business.

Fiske was excited by the possibility and soon Sager had transferred the land for a down payment covering a fifth of the purchase price. When a friend offered to loan him the rest of what he needed, the deal was done.

"People don't want the cabins to change much," he says, so he and Lorraine have set

about sprucing up the property. He points proudly to Rosell's original garage, now bearing a bright red roof and a new coat of rich brown stain as his first major accomplishment. Also, new beds in the cabins now bear fresh mattresses from Sunset Mattress Factory in Ossipee, and they've installed ceiling fans.

It's the beginning of a new era for the Sunset Lodges and a commitment for the Sager family. Sentiment for nature and family time together is a strong pull for them, and they hope others will visit in the months and years ahead.

Victoria and Wes may be reached by calling 781-2170 or sending an email to sunsetlodgesnh@gmail.com. The Web site is www.sunsetlodges.com.