

LOCALNEWS

End of an era

Former Rainy Lake Lodge building razed

BY LAUREL BEAGER
Editor

As a 12-year-old boy, Jami Schaak worked as a dock boy at the huge building on the shoreline of Frank's Bay of Rainy Lake.

Serving as general contractor for Wednesday's demolition of the former Rainy Lake Lodge building, the 50-plus-year-old man grew a bit nostalgic as he looked at the building.

He said he worked for (and guessed at the spellings of) the Lavold family which owned the lodge at the time, and recalled Frank Choes, for whom he said Frank's Bay is named.

"He was an old guy that cleaned all the fish for the lodge," he said.

Schaak said he cleaned fish, cleaned boats, and took care of the tourists as a dock boy.

As general contractor, he's razed most of the old buildings that were at the site, with the main lodge being the last one. Joe Donnell, of subcontractor Leinum Farms, warmed up the equipment Wednesday.

"I was too young for any of this," Donnell said smiling, after listening to recollections of people removing items from the building.

The buildings began to be removed after the property was purchased seven or eight years ago, Richard Thompson said, by the Camping and Education Foundation, which operates Camp Kooch-i-ching and Ogichi Daa Kwe, summer youth wilderness camps.

Thompson, who has served for about 20 years as a foundation board member and is now the foundation's community liaison, said he, and many other Borderland residents, have fond memories of times at Rainy Lake Lodge.

The Foundation's mission, according to its website is "to develop young



STAFF PHOTOS BY LAUREL BEAGER

Joe Donnell, left, and Jami Schaak discuss demolition of the former Rainy Lake Lodge building Wednesday morning.



Many local residents had ties to the Rainy Lake Lodge, which was razed Wednesday.

men and women in body and and spirit through wilderness experiences that celebrate a love of the outdoors that is as strong today as it was 90 years ago when Camp Kooch-i-ching first came to Deer Island."

Thompson said the old lodge was used until a new kitchen facility was constructed. The former lodge building became a fire trap and its removal is the last of the buildings that were located very near the shoreline, he said.

The area where the building sat will be kept open, allowing a view of the bay from the other buildings, and native grasses will be reestablished on the rocky ground.

Thompson said he believed the lodge was built in the early 1940s by the Lenth family, prior to its operation by Pete and Alla Brascugli. Many local folks and visitors to the lodge may recall a sign that hung for years at the lodge that said "For Pete's sake and the love of Alla."

While Thompson said he no longer imbibes, he laughingly admits, "I spent a lot of money in that place at one time."

The lodge, even as it was operated as a resort, was the site the camp used for parking and trip preparation from the 1950s to the 1970s, Thompson said.

Meanwhile, Pete Schultz, director of the area's convention and visitor center, said

he recalls visiting the lodge with his father, who sold vegetables to the Brascuglis for their restaurant.

"We would go up and have walleye dinner and I have fond memories of that," he said. "It was quite an institution when I was a kid in the early '60s."

Schultz said when he returned to Borderland after college and his first work experiences, the lodge was operated by Larry Willet and wife Sharon Kennedy.

"And again, I had fun times going up there, having fine food and then a couple beverages," Schultz said.

The Journal's Nov. 7 Looking Back feature noted in its 25-years-ago section "new owners of Rainy Lake



As much material inside the old lodge building as possible was salvaged for other use.



The Rainy Lake Lodge building was razed Wednesday.

Lodge were Dick and Karen Briese."

As the old building was razed, layers of paneling and paint were revealed, symbolic of the layers of history it once contained. Schaaf said an old, large safe, emptied years earlier, was found within the building, but otherwise he said no surprises were found during demolition.

In the last few years at

the site, 20 new buildings have been constructed that serve as camper cabins, art and crafts workshops, a trip center, a great lodge, and a director's cabin among others uses, Thompson said.

Work in recent years there has been devoted to establishing and operating Ogichi Daa Kwe, a camp for girls.

He noted the name means "strong spirited woman."

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• SEASON'S GREETINGS •

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