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Million-dollar resort offers dining and dancing in style

Paynesville, Minn.
A new million-dollar resort has taken root 5 miles southeast of Paynesville. It's called Crystal Hills.

The location is perhaps as unusual as the thing itself — a good notch farther south than these things have been happening. The last big resort built out this way was Arrowwood, a \$10-million venture near Alexandria, always a busy resort center, about 50 miles further north and another 50 west of Crystal Hills.

Paynesville is about 100 miles northwest of Minneapolis on picturesque, ups-downs, two-lane Hwy. 55 in good (if medium-active) resort country spotted around lakes in a farm belt.

Crystal Hills is on the west bank of the Crow River, north fork, just north of where it flows under Hwy. 55 between Koronis and Rice, both good resort lakes.

A few miles southwest, about midway between Paynesville and Willmar, is New London, a water-carnival and canoeing center on the middle fork of the Crow. Another fork runs down west of Litchfield. The Crow eventually winds eastward to Hennepin County.

From all this you might suppose that the Crystal Hill backers were aiming at the canoeing trade. They might, eventually, but not for a while.

Right now they're aiming at the eating trade with a fancy dining room and lounge, hammered copper bar, stainless steel dance floor and a cracking good kitchen, all of which opened a couple of weeks ago, with a lot of country and western music, some local and some from Nashville.

Next winter they'll be aiming at the eating, drinking, dancing, skiing and snowmobiling trade, although they don't plan on mixing the latter two outdoors. They have an oval racetrack for the snowmobilers.

For the skiers they have an amusing hill with a modest vertical rise and two camel humps spaced along 3,600 feet of south-east-facing decline, all open save for an oak tree or two and bordering on a terrace with an elegant chalet.

On this they are installing one chair lift, awaiting a second, planning some lesser tows and readying snowmaking apparatus.

After next winter a motor lodge or motel has been mentioned. There might well be a play for a little



Ben Kern
your weekend

convention trade.

The place has a grass-roots origin. Its financial backers are four brothers from nearby Atwater, south of Paynesville and east of Willmar: Erv, Gary, Harley and Roger Hoffman.

Starting from scratch, they worked from dirt-moving into a highly successful sewer, water and road construction business. Looking for a new direction, they picked not only an interesting setting on the Crow River but an interesting staff to run the new business, all of whom went from high school into their first jobs and have been working hard ever since.

Gary Johnson, 25, has been named president of the new project. Graduating from high school in Long Prairie, north of Sauk Centre, he went to Detroit, Mich., to work in a truck factory but hurt his hand in a sheet metal accident, so he answered another help-wanted ad and worked four years in a Control Data computer factory.

Laid off with 4,000 others in 1970, to work in a man's job with the Hoffmans and shot like a rocket to his present position.

Rod Christensen, directing the food operation, started working in restaurants at 15, in Willmar. Then he went in the Navy, got married, and, when his hitch was up, he and his wife managed the Westwood Inn on the north shore of Green Lake at Spicer, Minn.

"Senior citizen" Dean Carey, 37 and a grandfather, grew up in Park Rapids, worked with Rod Peterson at Val Chatel a bit, took up driving a "cat" on

road jobs and wound up driving one for the Hoffman brothers. He's half Irish and half German, and a good talker. They put him in charge of public relations.

The Crystal Hills staff is strong on improvisation. They drew up the chalet plans one evening and went to work on it the next day. Everything is staff designed, inspired by lingering impressions picked up here and there. One firm quoted a \$3,900 price for a wooden chandelier. The boys turned out something better for about one-sixth the price.

They aren't skiers, or weren't until they took a shot at Lutsen last winter. Johnson accused Carey of having skied before. Carey denied it but admitted that he had once been pulled on skis behind a horse.

Johnson's computer factory background shows in a kind of computerized liquor-dispensing system. Bottles of various boozes, stacked in tiers inside a locked room, feed into a maze of plastic tubes.

With the help of gravity and a small pump, the liquor is precisely measured, jigger by jigger, when the bartender pushes the button behind the bar. Each jigger is automatically registered and compared with the cash register tally.

There was a ski area here, also called Crystal Hills, a few years ago. Standing in its natural state, served by rope tows, it flopped. The boys have been moving dirt, piling up a commanding "platform" at the top of the back mound, and they expect refinements and luxury appeals to win the day where Mother Nature failed. Stranger things have happened.

Immediate future: "Los Bandidos" (July 10, 22), "Electric Cowboys" (July 24, Aug. 5) in the dance room. Dinner menu ranges from \$2.25 (ground steak) to \$5.95 (steak and lobster), luncheon from 80 cents (turkey sandwich) to \$2.95 (roast prime rib).

A self-service campground sign ("Money in envelope, envelope in box") mentioned here drew these notes from its owner, Fred H. Goff. He's a totally disabled Korean veteran. His wife and four daughters do the work. They designed Fleming Campground to catch the overflow from St. Croix State Park to the east on Hwy. 48. Said Goff: "Financially it hasn't yet been a success but it could be closed tomorrow and still have been a success because of

what our family has gained in building it."

Candlemaking Demonstrations 2 to 5 p.m. today at the St. Louis Park Historical Society's old Milwaukee Depot, restored and located in a park at 37th St. and Brunswick Av. S., just south of Hwy. 7.

Join a naturalist to wade, seine and investigate underwater life in **Lake Rebecca Park Reserve**, 1:30 and 3:30 p.m. today. Phone 472-4911 for reservations.

Population growth film, 3 p.m. and 7 p.m. today, 7:30 p.m. Monday, **Hyland Lake Park Reserve Nature Center**, Bloomington.

Touring Films ("Art Heritage," "Fourth of July") 3 p.m. today, **American Swedish Institute**, 2600 Park Av.

A "Good Ol' Fashioned Picnic" is planned for those 55 or older 1-5 p.m. Wednesday at River Park, 81st St. and W. River Rd. in **Brooklyn Park**. For transportation (50 cents) phone Ardath Wentz at 544-1173.

SUMMER FESTIVALS
Minnesota: **County Fair, Red Lake Falls**, Monday-Wednesday ... **Muskie Days, Nevis**, Tuesday-Wednesday ... **Paul Bunyan Sweetheart Day, Hackensack**, Wednesday ... **County Fair, Fergus Falls**, Wednesday through next Sunday ... **County Fair, Hallock**, Thursday-Sunday ... **County Fair, Fertile**, Thursday-Sunday ... **Korn and Klover Carnival, Hinckley**, Thursday-Saturday ... **Karl Oskar Days, Lindstrom**, Friday-Sunday ... **Mississippi Melody Showboat, Grand Rapids**, Friday-Sunday, July 29-31, 9 p.m. ... **Summer Fest and Lincoln County 100th anniversary, Hendricks**, Friday-Sunday.

North Dakota: Buffalo Trails Day, Epping, today ... **Buffalo Days, Jamestown**, today through next Sunday ... **International Festival of Arts Concerts, Dunseith**, today, Thursday, Saturday and Sunday ... **Old Settler's Day, McClusky**, Thursday-Saturday ... **County Fair, Fessenden**, Thursday-Sunday.

South Dakota: 4-H Rodeo, Blunt, today ... **Saddle Club Field Day, Timber Lake**, today ... **Mystic Hill Run, Hill City**, Monday ... **Hugh Glass Odyssey, Lemmon**, Friday ... **Black Hills Chamber Music, Rapid City**, Friday, also July 20 and 27.

Wisconsin: Fun Festival, New Richmond, Friday through next Sunday ... **Memory Days, Centuria**, Saturday-Sunday.

