



Indian Lake Lodge

Restoration prompted by childhood attachment

For 11 years the lodge at Indian Lake stood empty, serving only as a reminder of the great times that were enjoyed there during the boom years of the '60s. As the surrounding borough that is served by Somerset Rural Electric Cooperative continued to grow and prosper, the doors remained locked at the lodge. What had once been a beautiful rustic building that served as the center of activity at the lake was left to become a deteriorating eyesore.

Occasionally rumors of a new buyer would spread through the community. Sometimes there would be a news conference to announce a potential buyer. Newspapers, radio and television would cover the event — then the story would fade and the doors would remain locked and the deterioration would continue.

Mike Baltzer was a college freshman when the lodge closed in 1974. Because his father and grandfather were two of the original developers of Indian Lake, Mike had spent much of

his childhood there. As a teenager he worked for the family business, Shanksville Builders' Supply, that furnished building materials for and constructed the lodge and many of the homes at the lake. With this attachment to the area Mike says, "It was a heart-breaking thing just to see this place literally rotting away."

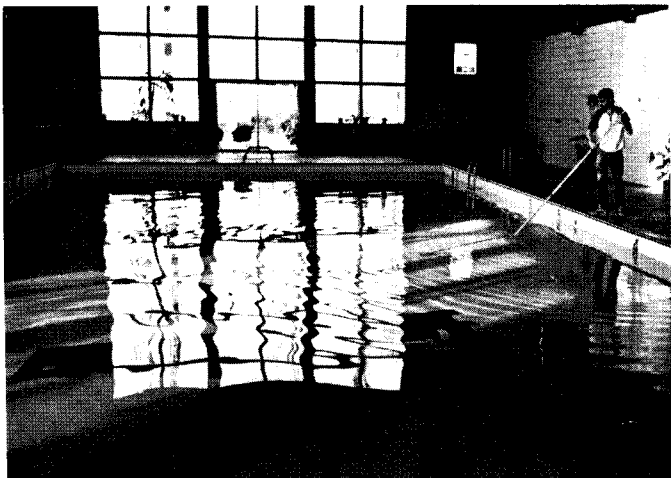
Finally, three years ago, Mike was in a position where he thought he might be able to do something about it. He contacted the owners about buying the lodge. "They really didn't take me very seriously at first," he said. But Mike's persistence paid off and a deal was struck.

Now, Indian Lake Lodge is owned by Mike Baltzer and his partner, Jim Holiday, who are operating as the Lakewood Corporation.

In February of 1986, the doors were unlocked and limited services were available to the public. "As the refurbishing was being done we opened in phases, using what was completed," Mike explained. By the end of 1986, the facilities were almost restored to the place they were 11 years ago. Once again the lodge is the center of activity at Indian Lake.

This has been a big job and it's not done yet. Mike says, "We weren't kidding ourselves going into this, we knew it was going to be difficult." Every part of the building was run down. Some parts could be repaired but others had to be totally gutted and rebuilt.

The motel was in such bad shape that everything was ripped out to the bare walls and scrapped. The remodeled rooms were all made into studio suites. Each suite has two double beds separated by a divider from a sitting area with couch and chairs. There is also a dry bar and refrigerator in this area. The modern decor in each room is very plush. To compliment the 32 studio suites will be conference rooms available to companies that wish to hold meetings and seminars in this laid-back country atmosphere.



POOL FACILITIES: This near olympic-size pool is a popular attraction at Indian Lake Lodge.

The outside of the motel has been redone with siding that blends into the rustic scheme of the lodge and surrounding country side. What was once an unsightly mess has been transformed into an eye-pleasing asset to the community of Indian Lake.

Mike points out, "Indian Lake Lodge is not a private club. The two large dining rooms and bar are open to the public." He says, "Private dinners and parties are welcomed by a staff that is eager to please you. They are working hard to see that the lodge will be the social center of the area."

People interested in physical fitness can buy a spa membership. That includes unlimited use of the 30 foot by 60 foot swimming pool and jacuzzi along with the exercise and weight room, tennis court and sauna. Special fitness classes such as pool aerobics are available for both men and women.

Beth Baltzer, spa manager, is the instructor and event planner for the spa. New for this year will be gymnastics for beginners and co-ed floor aerobics. Later in the year she has a triathlon planned for Indian Lake. She says, "We also work with a lot of non-profit organizations to help with their promotions and money raising events."

One of the most popular programs with the area mothers last summer was the day camp. It was held one day a week from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. It included activities like swimming, hiking, lunch, crafts, games, etc. Beth says, "Since word got out about last year's success I'm expecting it to be even bigger this summer."

The golf course was opened last summer. It was a little rough after being unattended for so long but after a season of proper care this nine hole course is well on the way to becoming a beautiful place to play golf. Golf memberships are available for families or individuals.

Highlighting the winter season at the lodge will be downhill and cross-country skiing. The slopes where so many folks came to learn to ski are open again. Mike says, "This was once considered the finest novice ski facility in the state of Pennsylvania." He explains, "The slopes are so geared to the novice and intermediate skier that they feel comfortable here."

Ski lessons are available from two veteran skiers. Keith Perl spent the last four years working for the ski school at Killington, Vermont, and is now on staff here. Tom Lochlin, who was on the U.S. National Free Style Ski Touring Team, will also be



SPA ACTIVITIES: Beth Baltzer, spa manager, demonstrates proper technique in using exercising equipment.

helping with ski instruction. Many local residents are extremely pleased to have this facility in operation in their backyards again.

It appears as though this development is back on track now. But it hasn't been easy. As Mike puts it, "To make something like this work, you have to be willing to put your heart and everything you have into it."

Few people realize there is a little history here at Indian Lake. This development that started in the early '60s kind of set the stage for a lot of things that happened since then with other developments across the country. According to Mike, "The first condominium in Pennsylvania was right here at Indian Lake."

With this facility in operation again the local economy has been given a boost. It now provides jobs for 55 people including part-time employees. This number could increase if the Lakewood Corporation can meet their plans for the future. The coming year should see another 32 studio suites renovated. That will complete the renovation part of the project. The future plans are for new construction of second home condominiums or townhouse developing. Mike says, "Long term, seven to ten years, there is approximately 15 million dollars worth of real estate to be developed here."

Cooperative members, Mike Baltzer and Jim Holiday have brought the Lakewood Corporation a long way in the past year. With their plan for sensible growth, this area could again become one of the important resorts in Somerset County. □

--Larry W. Shober



PARTNERS IN LAKEWOOD CORPORATION: Mike Baltzer, shown above, and Jim Holiday, have restored and reopened Indian Lake Lodge.



COMPLETE FACELIFT: Renovated motel exterior blends into the rustic country setting of Indian Lake.