



The Green Sheet

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Remember, ads are free to BLCA Members. Get your information to Carol Kufner at 743-3753 before the 20th of the month.

For Sale:

Go-Cart \$500.00

Mini-bike \$125.00

Electric Quarterback Pass-Attack Game, 4 ft. by 6 1/2 ft. high, \$45.00

Power Glide Hockey Table, 2 ft. by 5 ft., \$15.00

John 743-2130

Missing: Two dock pieces, 4 ft. by 4 ft., beige vinyl. East side of Lake Julia. Ron 743-2434

Pontoon Hauling to access \$40.00. Pat 743-4263

This We Remember: Tom Eilers and Denny Olson, Big Elk Lake

Two long-time residents of the east side of Big Elk Lake reminisced recently about their histories and memories of “living on the lake.” Both Tom Eilers and Denny Olson have long relationships with Big Elk Lake, although they didn’t know each other well in their younger years. Tom has a long lineage of relatives living and farming in the area and came up to the lake to visit, mostly on weekends and summers, while Denny has lived on the lake full time since he was 6.

The Eilers have certainly been around Big Elk Lake for a while. Tom’s dad Harvey grew up on the Eilers’ farm just south of Big Elk Lake, as did his grandfather Henry. In fact, his family ties go back another generation: his great grandfather, Gerhardt, came from Germany and purchased the land for the farm. Tom’s father left the farm at age 21, but the farm itself stayed in the family. Now Tom and three sisters, as a partnership, own the land and lease it out as farmland.

Tom’s mom and dad had a cabin just down the block from where he lives now. He had a successful painting contract business in the cities, but decided on moving to the lake full time in 1986 when he purchased the Elk Lake Resort from Walt and Carol Hertz.

When Tom was a boy his aunt lived on Camp Lake, and he remembers that lake, as well as Briggs Lake, being clear, but Big Elk being green. There was a Big Elk Lake Association at the time, and they had the DNR out to look at the lake and tell them why it was green. He remembers his dad being told by the DNR that although the lake was green, it was a healthy lake. Tom was quick to point out that the *green* at that time was different from the *toxic blue-green algae* that has been present the past couple of years.

Denny Olson has been on Big Elk Lake for 66 years, coming with his family when he was just 6 years old. Unlike Eilers, Denny’s family lived year round at the lake, along with the Hollinders and Halvorsons, the only other full-time residents. It was the Halvorson farm that was flattened by the 1967 tornado that raged through the lakes area. Denny recalls the long bus rides he made into Clear Lake, then St. Cloud, for school. Bus driver Alfred Goenner drove the old bus which was so drafty that he had to put old socks in the window gaps to keep the cold out. Roads were not as developed as now, and snow plowing was less effective. He remembers “Skinny” Berger coming to get the kids with a team of horses and a sled after the bus was stuck in deep snow.

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As was true for many others on Big Elk, fishing was a large part of lake life: sunnies, crappies, bass, northern, and walleye were all plentiful when there were sufficient weeds. Both Tom and Denny suspect the use of copper sulfate, used to control algae, was a big reason for the decline in the fishing. Now it is nothing like it was, and there seems to be more northerns than walleye. They both see a definite decline in water quality. As they remember from the 50s, the lake was deeper then, averaging around 12 feet deep. But over the years sediment from farms upstream has flowed into the lake with the Elk River, leading to an average depth now of about 8 feet.

Swimming was another pastime. There were floating rafts everywhere. Denny would often swim off of Dick Bates' raft, the same Dick Bates who swam across the lake for bragging rights. Although Denny was not part of it, it was one of the things guys did to pass the time.

The Elk Lake Resort was a main attraction in the 50s, owned and operated then by Joe Kuehn, whose son Ralph would walk up to the main building on his crutches and play cards and watch TV. Especially popular were the Friday night fights, sometimes highlighting the great Joe Lewis. Later Byron Johnson owned the resort and made a successful trade with the DNR: Johnson gave 50 feet of shoreline to the DNR for the public access, and the DNR dug him a lagoon, which is still there but in a slightly different configuration.

Tom bought Elk Lake Resort and the 3.2 beer joint in 1986. He had a successful contract painting business in the cities, but the opportunity was there to be a resort owner: 7 cabins, 17 hookups for camping, showers, laundry, boats, bait, burgers, and pizza. However, three hundred sixty-five days a year, all day, every day, plus campers discontent with the water quality became too much. He closed the resort in 1991, and since then has sold a couple of cabins and kept several as rentals.

When Tom thought of his fondest memories, he replied, "Lots of swimming, skiing, fishing, campfires at night...all good times. It was just like heaven around here. I couldn't wait to get up here on Fridays. It was so safe we didn't lock up anything, not even the motors on the boats." For Denny it was somewhat reversed. He lived here year round, and since there were not a lot of people, he found things to do outside: hunting, fishing and trapping. But since he was already here at the lake, he couldn't wait for Friday when his buddies came back to the lake.

Among Denny's many memories are stealing apples from Frank Hart's grandfather's apple tree, raising vegetables and strawberries on a large three acre garden, selling home-grown watermelons from the back of their truck in Little Falls, and selling their sweet corn door-to-door around the Briggs Lake chain. Denny's grandfather had an army squad tent and took him camping on that small peninsula of land jutting out between Rush and Briggs, the land now occupied by the Herkenhoff and Demeules' homes. At that time, he remembers there being no cabins on Cedar Point. From their camping spot his grandfather took them to Cottonwood Beach, where "we'd drink pop and grandfather drank his Grain Belt."

Both Denny and Tom remember another character from the lake. Herman Hollinder had a small shed just north of what is now the public access, from which he sold pop, beer and candy, and rented flat bottom boats that he made himself. Hollinder also cut ice in the winter and stored the blocks in sawdust for sale in the summer, all before there was electricity.

The biggest changes they both have seen are summer cabins being made into all-season homes, the lake getting shallower and greener, so many more people, and kids not being as active outdoors as they used to be. Should they each have a magic wish, Denny would cut the crappie limit from 10 to 5 to allow for more crappie growth and do something (like dredging the lake) to restore it to its original depth. Tom's wish would be to limit the size of boat motors on the lake, lower the limit on fish, and have slot size only.

by Kenzie Phelps