

## 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Our Founding Members

As presented during the 2022 AGM, George Alcock (Executive Director) held up a copy of the original Letters Patent as signed by the Honourable Minister of Ontario Consumer and Commercial Relations, Mr. Frank Drea., dated January 15, 1979, and by his signature issued a charter constituting a corporation.

The original is in the Park Office, under lock and key.

Part of this document includes an application filed to incorporate a corporation without share capital under the name **Pigeon Lake Campers Association** to be carried on, without the purpose of gain, for its members, and any profits or other accretions to the corporation shall be used in promoting its objects. The application was signed by the 10 selected park members on December 5<sup>th</sup>, 1978.

These 10 members back in 1978 were comprised of 6 men and 4 women coming cities and towns in Ontario. Places like Peterborough, Whitby, Scarborough and Toronto. Their backgrounds and occupations were varied from a Corporate VP and CEO, a Consultant, an Investigator, a Jeweler / Gemologist, a Buyer, an Insurance agent and a Housewife.

These 10 represented the interests of approximately 277 families, seasonal campers; future members that were planning to buy a trailer park on Pigeon Lake by the name of Wildwood Camperland.

Wildwood you say I'll get back to that in a minute. But first a little bit of background.

In June 1972, two brothers, Don and John Bowes under the name Hedonics Incorporated filed a permit to develop the surrounding acreage including Sandy Point. Part of that acreage included a camp site called Totemin Tourist Camp, with an Olympic sized pool, recreation center, tennis courts, 90 slip marina, satellite washrooms and various out buildings. It remained as a campground until its final season in 1976.

Financial hardships forced the sale of Totemin to Hanna Barbera Productions Inc. and the campground was opened as a franchise, in partnership with a real estate investment company, 332595 Ontario, its President was Richard "Dick" Lehnen. This park was being transformed from a transient weekend campground into a seasonal stay and play tent & trailer park.

Richard Lehnem had a vision. Why run this park as part of a franchise when it could be something bigger and better and more profitable as a privately owned business?

Around this room you can see some of the mementoes and memorabilia from those days gone by, photos, publishing, pictures of Yogi Bear, a map of the park and so forth.

There are two differing interpretations how and why the partnership between Hanna Barbera (Jellystone) and Dick Lehnem (332595 Ontario) was dissolved.

One version claims Hanna Barbera was upset with his park management, his vision of long-term occupancy of sites and Lehnem not fulfilling the obligations of a franchisee.

The other version claims Lehnem became disenchanted with Hanna Barbera. They had promised him exclusive franchise rights to Jellystone Campgrounds in this Ontario region and they were hindering his investment strategy.

Either way they parted company. The franchise arrangement with Yogi Bear Jellystone Campgrounds was terminated and he took sole ownership of the park and by the next season he began to remove all evidence of Yogi, Hanna Barbara, and the Jellystone connection. With that the park needed a new name, a new identity.

He renamed this park Wildwood Camperland, the name Wildwood remained until July of 1982.

Within the second season of park ownership, Lehnen created a unique “opportunity” to generate more revenue, by proposing a “lease to own” offer to the existing seasonal renters. The first registered “lease” I have found, was signed in May 1977 for sites 58 and 108.

In the 70’s under Lehnen’s ownership, this park began to grow rapidly. It was a truly unique idea this far removed from the city.

He proposed, in addition to the seasonal maintenance, he was willing to lease you your site for a onetime upfront payment of between \$4000 - \$5300, (depending on the site location) for a period of a 20 years.

At the end of the 20 year lease, for \$2, you would “own” your site and a portion of the entire park. Sound familiar?

By the following camping season “lease to own” was your only option to get into this park. 277 campers, chose this option and signed the agreement.

With the upfront cash and projected future income, Lehnen’s investment companies, including AMDEVCO (AM DEV CO) and R.E. Lehnen Amdevco Realty could use that as collateral to secure business loans through by which he could acquire other private parks. 3 – 4 to be precise.

Meanwhile Wildwood lessees began to grow very concerned. Without a say in the day to day running and finances of the park, Lehnen could begin to set exorbitant increasing annual maintenance fees over the next 20 years and more importantly he could to squander away their future assets. Some became aware of “Dick” using this asset to finance other real estate purchases.

You may have heard a phrase used what we commonly refer to as our “sister park” in Port Severn, appropriately named Wildwood by the Severn. ... Originally a Lehnen owed property, later purchased by ***their*** membership.

At this point, in 1977 & 78 large groups of park members gathered to share their concerns and plan a strategy. After many months of planning, numerous meetings, legal involvement, and professional

guidance, along with the assistance and support of many park member volunteers a core group of 10 individuals was formed.

What resulted were the application of the Letters Patent in December of 1978 and the incorporation of Pigeon Lake Campers Association in January of 1979. Remember Richard “Dick” Lehnem still technically “owned” and ran the park but even then, the collective membership was doing what would become necessary to protect their assets.

Soon after, Richard Lehnem and his investment companies were unable to meet the growing financial obligations, we’re talking in excess of \$1 million dollars plus interest. He was forced to declare bankruptcy and all assets were to be liquidated. The primary lien holder was The Royal Bank of Canada now known as RBC. All equipment and business holdings were removed and liquidated and the members of Wildwood were given notice to vacate the property, remove their belongings, their personal effects and pull out their trailers by the end of **that** camping season.

***But...wait a minute... they had signed legal documents stating the conditions of “lease to own” arrangement as well as the approved incorporation of PLCA. You can’t just evict us!***

Not according to RBC legal, **they** were in the right and they were owed their money! The legal battle ensued their lawyers, our lawyers. After lengthy deliberation and significant legal costs to us it was determined that “by contract” PLCA members could be given the **opportunity** to settle the part of the financial debt owing.

A financial settlement was agreed upon to satisfy the obligation, it was then up to the membership to come up with the money, which they did. \$700 per site. Those 277 are affectionately referred to as the “Founding Members”.

These “Founding Members” financed the corporation with an interest free loan in their time of need. Due to an aggressive marketing strategy, the Association repaid the entire loan within the next 2 seasons. They accomplished this by generating “sales” of lease agreements, much like the agreement that each of us signed when we moved into this park.

Oh and as a sidebar, once Wildwood by the Severn caught wind of our negotiations with RBC they too made arrangements to form the Port Severn Camper’s Association and buy their park outright, a park which is also a not for profit, members owned, resort very similar to our own.

After meetings, discussions and a vote, it was determined that camp Wildwood should be renamed as Pigeon Lake Campers **Resort** on July 1<sup>st</sup> 1982, 40 years ago.

January 1979 to July 2020, 43 ½ years is a very... very long time to be a member of the Pigeon Lake Campers Association. Many of the “Founding Fathers and Mothers” have left us, leaving behind a legacy of foresight, determination, volunteerism and a sincere love for this park and what it represents.

When George presented this at the AGM, time did not permit him to read all 277 names of these “Founding Members”, however, he did take the opportunity to thank them and to recognize those 12 that are still with us. He acknowledged these 12, and to these we express our gratitude.

Site 16- Lynn McGilchrist

Site 29- Robert and Annie Walters

Site 81- Vince and Brenda Tuepah

Site 95- Doug Purchase and Joanne Smith

Site 222- Don Bradford

Site 227- Judith Smith

Site 230- Dave and Susan Veino Jr.

Site 244- Robert Browne

Site 246- Gerald and Judy Jardine



Site 274- Orlando and Daphne Ieraci

Site 279- Mary Ann Edmondson

Site 315- Leo and Anita Post