

ESCAPE IN THE SKY



Owner Darrin Stuhr stands on the balcony of the Bears Den cabin July 28 at the Treetop Village in Crosslake. Photos by Kelly Humphrey / Brainerd Dispatch

CROSSLAKE TREETOP VILLAGE OFFERS UNIQUE RENTAL EXPERIENCE

By **Theresa Bourke**
Brainerd Dispatch

Ashley and Nathan Schiesser spent their fifth anniversary this summer in the same spot, enjoying all Crosslake had to offer and even spotting a black bear.

Nestled back in the trees off Daggett Pine Road — close to town but secluded enough

— stand two tree-house-style cabins, raised off the ground on stilts and complete with heating, air conditioning, a fireplace and a full kitchen.

Both the Hermannys and the Schiessers are already looking forward to the next time they can book another sky-

high stay at the Crosslake Treetop Village, a unique rental experience attracting visitors from all over the country.

Hermannys stumbled upon the property online by chance, listed on a website detailing unique places to stay.

"My husband and I have three small chil-

dren, and we were just looking for a place where we could be together," Hermannys said during a phone interview Aug. 11. "It didn't really matter to us where it was, and particularly during COVID, it's not like we were going anywhere."

The Schiessers have a timeshare with family in

Breezy Point but wanted some place in the area to themselves to spend their anniversary.

The Crosslake Treetop Village fit the bill perfectly in both scenarios.

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— Advertiser —

Small Company, Big Impact

By Susan Smith-Grier

Years ago, young people were taught the "Golden Rule." This age-old concept was taught not only in Sunday School lessons but also at the kitchen table, and in schools of all types. It merely stated, "Do unto others as you would have others do unto you." Advantage PCA is a family owned and operated business that takes this rule to heart.

Since 2008 Advantage PCA and Senior Care has been providing home care services to families in the Brainerd lakes area and throughout central Minnesota. One of the hallmarks of this business is their dedication to person-centered care. Advantage PCA has been practicing this personal caring service since day one, emphasis on the word caring.

Having had the personal experience of nurturing their own special needs child, the founders of Advantage PCA realized there was more need in the community for high-quality, home based, person-centered care. The business was born in answer to this call.

Holistic Caring for Others

Providing personalized care for another person is what most people expect from a home care business. When you hire a PCA or home care provider you hope that the person will treat your loved one as well as you would. Advantage PCA caregivers do just that and more. "Our caregivers often go above and beyond the average care," said CEO Cindy Urbaniak. "This statement sums up who we are: 'We believe everyone, regardless of diagnosis or different abilities has the God-given right to live their lives to their full potential; together we can make that happen.'"

All care coordinators, licensed social workers and RNs also have some level of personal experience with someone in their life needing care. Whether it be a child or adult with special needs or a parent living

with Alzheimer's or coping with the aftermath of a stroke, the Advantage team has first-hand understanding of what the families of their clients are living with. This business takes caring one step further.

Caring for the Caregivers

Nationally, the turnover rate for people in this industry is high. As an employee, nationally the average caregiver will stay on the job for two years. In comparison, the turnover rate for caregivers at Advantage PCA is considerably lower than the industry standard. Some caregivers have been with the business for the entire 11 years since it first began offering services. Advantage PCA has the unique trait of caring for the caregivers. All employees are valued and the Caregiver of the Month program acknowledges the best of the best.

Urbaniak attributes high employee loyalty to the care given to the placement process used to match caregivers with clients. "We really look at what's going to work well for our caregivers — what does he or she want in a schedule, what's going to work best for that caregiver's family and what's going to work best for their schedule." Consequently, the matching process considers a variety of factors on both sides, client and caregiver, and results in a match that works for everyone. Respecting the needs of the caregiver as well as the needs of the client reduces the attrition so common to this industry.

Doing for Others

Caring for others is a very rewarding experience. "We are very passionate about these services and the life changing effects that they can have on not just the recipient, but the entire family and the communities they live in." Watching people blossom with person-centered care is one of the many rewards Advantage PCA staff witness on a regular basis.



Advantage salutes and recognizes all of our Family and Professional Caregivers this Labor Day!

THANK YOU for the excellent care you provide our clients and families you work with. We are very proud of the work you do and we recognize and appreciate the significant difference you make in someone's life.

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A view of the cabin from the loft in the Crosslake Treetop Village.

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Stacey and Terry Koch opened the village in fall 2017, getting the idea from the TV show "Treehouse Masters."

Constructed by Wes Hanson Buildings, Bears Den and Anglers Way, as each treehouse is called, are each decorated according to their names — bears and a woody feel in one, and a fishing theme in the other.

They have all the amenities vacationgoers could ask for — three queen beds, a cozy loft, a fire pit and hammock chairs

outside, a kitchen full of appliances and — perhaps most importantly — that unmistakable "up north" cabin feel that draws so many to the Brainerd lakes area.

"Even just driving up to it, it's just such a statement because it's up on those stilts," Hermanny said. "And it had recently snowed, so it was just kind of nestled in the woods and just was so beautiful."

Complete with a Christmas tree tucked in one corner, the treehouse's charm exceeded even the photos on Airbnb.com. It was cozy without being crowded.

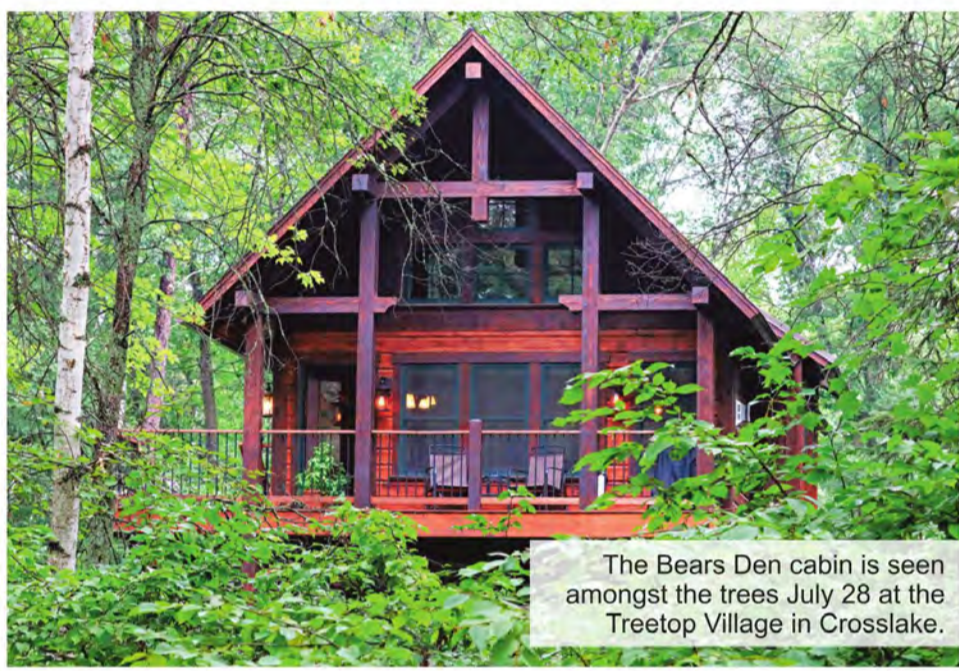
Hermanny's two older kids stayed up in the loft, which has two queen-sized beds and an overhead view of the woods outside.

"They just thought that was the coolest thing they've ever seen in their lives," she said.

It was an idyllic woody cabin experience for the family, which made use of the Crosslake Community Center just a stone's throw away with trails for snowshoeing and hills for sledding.

The TV is tucked away in the corner, available for watching movies if

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The Bears Den cabin is seen amongst the trees July 28 at the Treetop Village in Crosslake.

Advertorial

JN Tree Service Your Local Tree Experts

By Sarah Herron

Trees surround the lakes area and as beautiful as they may be they can also cause some problems too. Downed trees or limbs can be fire and safety hazards. JN Tree Service specializes in hazardous tree removal and high risk trimming. It may be tempting to try it on your own, but there is great risk of personal injury or damage to your house. This fully insured tree service company is educated and experienced in tree removal. They will quickly and efficiently clean up your property.

JN Tree Service also specializes in commercial and residential lot clearing, brush clearing, stump grinding and services needed to keep your existing trees healthy. Tree health is something many property owners neglect but that regular basic maintenance is something trees need. Owner Joe Nelson says, "It's important to get your trees dead wooded. Removing those limbs that may be hazardous, diseased or pest ridden will preserve the health of your trees. We do complete pruning and trimming." Fall is the time to get your oaks and elms trimmed!

In recent years when heavy storms have blasted through the lakes area, JN Tree Service was instrumental in helping residents and businesses with the overwhelming task of clean up for months afterward.

Nelson and his crew will ensure your time outdoors is enjoyable when you leave the clean-up in their experienced hands. Call 800-630-2960 or visit www.jntreeservice-landscaping.com.

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THE PANDEMIC WAS OBVIOUSLY A BIG REASON FOR PEOPLE TO JUST GET AWAY FROM HOME, BUT IT'S CONTINUING, EVEN TUESDAY, WEDNESDAY, THURSDAY — THE ODD DAYS OF THE WEEK — FILLED RIGHT UP.

- DARRIN STUHR, RESORT OWNER



Owner Darrin Stuhr pauses in the loft at the Bears Den treetop cabin in Crosslake July 28. (Below) Stuhr talks about the rental properties Wednesday, July 28, at the Bears Den treetop cabin in Crosslake.

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desired but not the center focus of the room, allowing the family to concentrate instead on one another, play games, eat pancakes and just be together.

If they wanted to go into town and see people, it was close by. But if they wanted to stay in their little hideaway by themselves, they could do that, too.

"It was exactly what we wanted. It was a place for us to be together and to just enjoy each other's company," Hermann said.

The "up north" feel is exactly what Ashley Schiesser was looking for, coming from Lakeville, and she wasn't disappointed, especially with the wildlife. Spotting a black bear while staying

in the Bears Den was a definite high point of the trip, as was being so close to plenty of restaurants and other things to do.

"10/10 recommend it for a long weekend, a short weekend, family, no family. It's a great place."

A BOOMING BUSINESS

The Kochs put the village up for sale in fall 2020.

Darrin Stuhr had just booked one of the treehouses for a deer hunting trip later that fall, and when he saw the property was for sale, he decided to jump — before having ever stayed there.

"We thought, 'Oh no, we're going to lose our cabin. Someone's going to buy this and kick us out,'" Stuhr said during an interview in the Bears Den July 28.

Stuhr, who lives in Eden Prairie, had already been thinking about buying property in the lakes area, as his brother lives on Cross Lake.

"We came up here on a Friday and just loved it and put an offer in," he said.

The Stuhrs originally planned on using the treehouse for themselves and renting it out at other times just to cover some of the costs, but the popularity of the unique rental overtook the family's original idea.

Mike Camplin had similar plans when he purchased Anglers Way a year ago.

His family was renting a cabin on Trout Lake, and being laid off during the COVID-19 pandemic gave him some extra time to think about the idea of buying property

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By Sheila DeChantal

Black Arrow Martial Arts is located in downtown Brainerd at 217 Washington Street, founded in July of 2012 by local Jiu-Jitsu black belt professor Jared Feierabend. Jared had a vision for opening a martial arts academy that would bring world class Jiu-Jitsu to the Brainerd lakes area.

Jiu-Jitsu is primarily a grappling art that provides the tools to learn how to protect yourself against opponents of all sizes and statures, emphasizing the power of proper technique as a force to balance out potential strength disadvantages. Yet those who take part in Jiu-Jitsu classes receive much more including confidence building, weight loss, skills in self-protection, as well as a chance to meet like-minded people.

Black Arrow offers a traditional yet stylish environment that is clean, family friendly and safe. The atmosphere Black Arrow provides is optimal for students to succeed.

Every class is taught by a Jiu-Jitsu black belt instructor that is 100% committed to helping you achieve your individual goals.

Black Arrow Martial Arts has been honored to have been voted "Best Fitness Center" both in 2019 and again in 2021. This is an honor they take great pride in, knowing that Jared's original vision for this academy has come to light, making a positive impact in and on our community.

CLASS INFORMATION

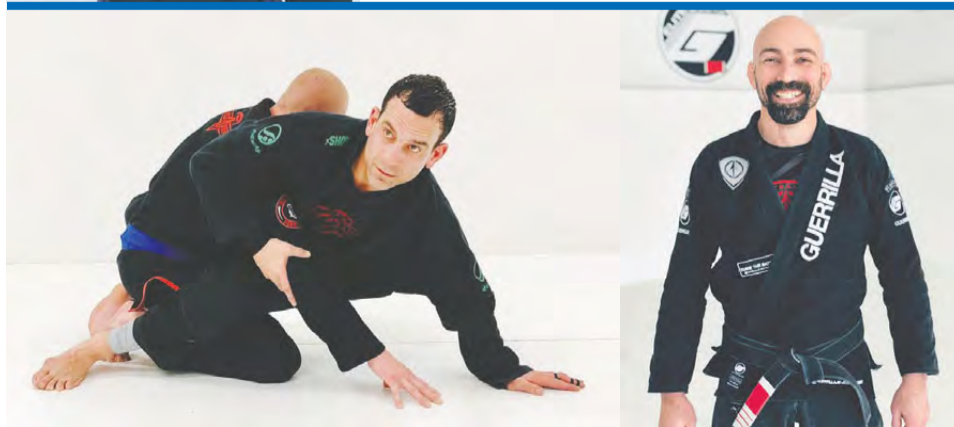
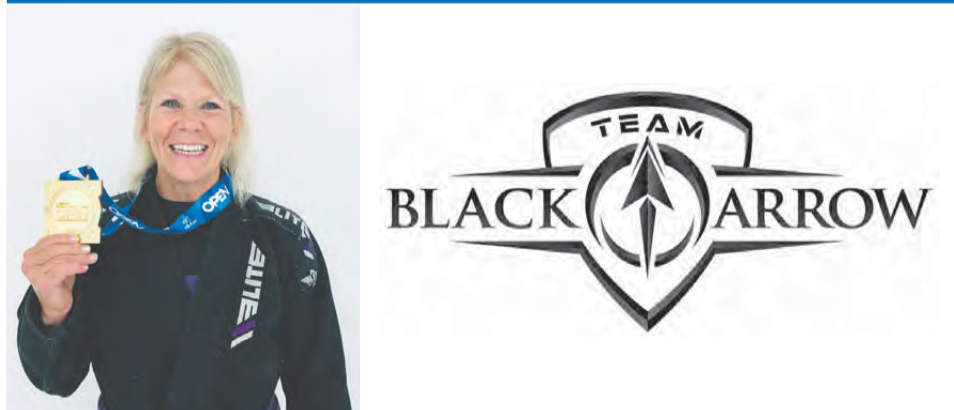
Jiu-Jitsu classes are offered for adults and kids of all ages Monday through Saturday.

Children can begin training as young as 3 years old.

Adult classes range from ages 16 to 70-plus.

No experience is required to begin training at Black Arrow Martial Arts. Every new student gets a free class taught by a Jiu-Jitsu black belt.

See www.blackarrowmartialarts.com for more information.



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up north near Brainerd, where his wife is from.

A New Zealand native now living in St. Paul, Camplin has spent a lot of time in the lakes area with his wife's family and fell in love with the region.

"I was just looking on Zillow ... and these came up, and I thought, 'Wow, this is cool,' and then we just continued the process," Camplin said during a video interview July 28.

Now, the rental aspect of the properties far exceeds the personal use.

"We have learned the hard way that we have to plan a little bit further in advance if we want to stay at our own cabin," Camplin joked.

The treehouses are booked at about 85-90% capacity each month.

"The pandemic was obviously a big reason for people to just get away from home, but it's continuing," Stuhr said. "Even Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday — the odd days of the week — filled right up."

And even though bookings are through the roof, Stuhr still has plans to improve his property even further, including the addition of a shuffleboard court below the treehouse and perhaps a barrel sauna out back. The two owners have also thought about finding boat slips they can rent out so any of their guests who want to come up with boats can do so easily without having to park them in the woods.

"Even though it's not a lake property, it's as good as or close to," Camplin said, noting the lakes aren't far away. "It's an incredible property, incredible location."

TREEHOUSE MANAGEMENT

With neither Stuhr nor Camplin living in the Crosslake area, they rely heavily on two things to keep the properties running — trusty technology and an even trustier housekeeper.

The treehouses are equipped with Google Nest products, meaning the locks, security system, thermostats and everything are able to be controlled from anywhere.

"It's really a great setup to be able to do this remotely and not have the fear of you're going to have to run up here because someone's key doesn't work," Stuhr said, noting he can set codes instead of relying on traditional keys.

Jamie Ganz is the duo's other crucial management tool. She cleans, does the laundry and even enlists her husband to do some light maintenance jobs around the treehouses.

"She's our eyes to the cabin when we're not around," Stuhr said.

For Ganz, who owns Ganz Cleaning Service based in Breezy Point, the responsibility is encouraging.

"It's definitely a lot more than I do for my other rentals, but it's also made me more aware of a lot of things when I go into other homes and clean them, and it's given me an eye for a little bit more detail," Ganz said during a phone interview Aug. 11. "... You go into a normal house, and you're not necessarily looking for damages or things to be broken or anything like that, whereas when you go into these rentals, they're not there to check everything, so I'm their eyes and ears to make sure that nothing is broken or significant damage has been done,



WHILE PEOPLE COME HERE FOR THIS UNIQUE CABIN BECAUSE OF THE WAY IT'S BUILT, AND IT'S UP IN THE TREES, WHEN THEY LEAVE IT SEEMS LIKE THEY'RE COMMENTING A LOT ABOUT THE PEACEFULNESS ... AND THE ANIMALS THAT THEY SEE.

- DARRIN STUHR, RESORT OWNER



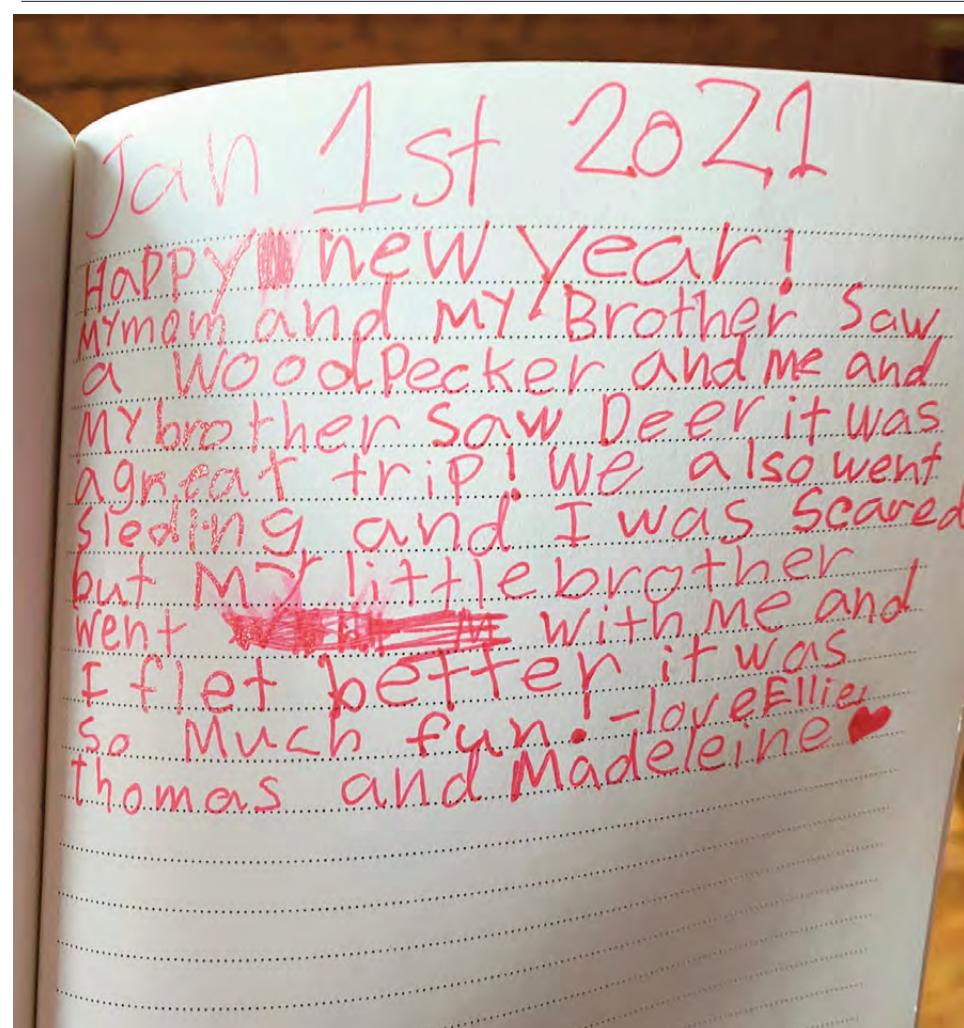
Photos by Kelly Humphrey / Brainerd Dispatch (Top) Owner Darrin Stuhr talks about the unique rental properties Wednesday, July 28, at the Treetop Village in Crosslake. (Middle) Unique stairs lead up to the second level at one of the treetop cabins in Crosslake (Left) A bear puzzle sits out on a table at the cabins in Crosslake. (Right) A bedroom on the first level at one of the treetop cabins in Crosslake.

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Contributed photos

(Left) Ellie Hermanny, 6 years old at the time, wrote about her family's stay at the Crosslake Treetop Village in the treehouse guestbook. (Right) Alex Hermanny stands on the balcony of The Bears Den at the Crosslake Treetop Village during his family's stay last December. Pictured below are his children Thomas, Madeleine and Ellie.

so it's definitely humbling for me that they trust me to check those things, and they basically trust me with their property."

Stuhr had managed townhomes prior to buying his treehouse, but neither owner had much experience in the rental business, and Ganz has made that transition

for them as easy as can be. And her high-quality work is reflected in the many reviewers who mention the treehouses' cleanliness.

"Get yourself a really good housekeeper," Stuhr said as a word of advice to rental owners.

Camplin and Stuhr contract with vendors

for lawn care and snow removal services and do a little bit of marketing on social media, but with the help of websites like Airbnb and VRBO, running the properties is a pretty low-stress job.

"We were lucky enough to buy well-designed, good-looking properties that really sell

themselves," Camplin said. "It's a cute little cabin up in the trees. It's close to the lakes; it's a beautiful location, and it's quiet. It's got all the amenities of a hotel room without the cost and without the other people. It's unique and it's secluded and independent from anything else, so I think that's why people choose our cabins to stay at."

Just the word "treehouse" is often a draw to potential guests, and the atmosphere once they get there is usually enough to make them want to come back.

"While people come here for this unique cabin because of the way it's built, and it's up in the trees, when they leave it seems like they're com-

menting a lot about the peacefulness — which is kind of surprising because we're in town — and the animals that they see," Stuhr said.

Schiesser has already been in contact with Stuhr about the next time she might be able to come back for a stay — hopefully during the fall or winter — but with the secret of the luxury treehouses hidden away in the woods of Crosslake slowly leaking out, that may be easier said than done.

But it just means Stuhr and Camplin keep getting to meet new people and read more fun entries in their guestbooks. Visitors tend to share personal, intimate stories with their hosts, including one couple who

Camplin recalled saying they found out they were pregnant while staying at Anglers Way.

"It's a business, but it's also just a community that you're starting to build," he said.

And it's new friends being made along the way.

"It's been surprisingly fun. As a host ... we get to know the guests personally and share a lot of information. I'm Facebook friends with some of them now," Stuhr said. "The guests are so appreciative. It makes it so fun and makes all your hard work here really, really worth it."

THERESA BOURKE may be reached at theresa.bourke@brainerddispatch.com or 218-855-5860. Follow her on Twitter at www.twitter.com/DispatchTheresa.

CROSSLAKE TREETOP VILLAGE

► **City:** Crosslake.

► **Number of employees:** The two owners contract with different vendors for housekeeping and lawn care.

► **Interesting fact:** The original owners of the treetop village got the idea from the TV show "Treetop Masters."

Advertorial

Cheer up your home with a visit to Lonesome Cottage

By SUE SMITH-GRIER

When you hear the name Lonesome Cottage, your first thought may be of a Hallmark movie with a lonesome widow or widower in a lovely little woodland cottage pining away for love. You would never suspect it to be the name of the USA's largest rustic furniture maker — and based locally in the Brainerd lakes area.

The family owned and operated business employs 60 artisans and craftsmen plying their talents in Pequot Lakes. Brandon and Jill Andersen have much to be proud of with their rustic furniture enterprise. In fact, they seem to be quietly building a small business empire.

Lonesome Cottage is your one stop shop for rustic home furnishings and décor. The newly opened design center with revamped showroom offers everything you need to create your individualized statement. From vinyl plank flooring to rugs to blinds, the new design center makes creating the perfect space exciting and rewarding. They even have a professional designer on staff to help with your design vision.

In addition to the Lonesome Cottage rustic furniture enterprise, Wooded River is also part of their holdings. Wooded River offers unique custom drapes and bedding along with other products to make your home special. Located in Idaho, the Wooded River plant is known for its excellence in design and craftsmanship. The specialized designs perfectly set off the rustic furniture pulling together the entire

look.

Wooded River provides customers with hundreds of options. You can mix and match colors, materials, fabrics and leathers. Your vision combined with the expertise of professional designers can create an atmosphere in your home unique to your lifestyle. You can learn more about Wooded River by visiting www.woodedriver.com.

The Andersens don't just help you achieve a beautifully rustic look inside your home, they also offer an opportunity for you to create a home away from home. Lonesome Yurts and Treehouses are yet another branch of the Lonesome family businesses that can add to your enjoyment of the lakes area. Stop by their showroom in Pequot Lakes to check out the model. Their yurts are used nationwide including the Grand Canyon, Wisconsin and Idaho. Locally, they collaborated with the school district to provide an outdoor yurt classroom to enhance their outdoor educational experience.

For more information about Lonesome Cottage products, visit www.lonsomecottage.com and www.lonsomeyurts.com and don't forget www.woodedriver.com for unique textiles.



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