



**BIRCH POINT LODGE ——— HALIBURTON, ONT. CANADA.**

The Birch Point Lodge opened on Lake Kashagawigamog in 1922 and closed in 2003. Back in the day, Tim Hagarty says he and his family would visit Birch Point for \$22 a week, with three home cooked meals a day included in the cost. Birch Point was one of 17 resorts on Kashagawigamog and Canning Lake in the mid-20th century. Today, only three remain. /PHOTO SUBMITTED

# Resorts were backdrop of Haliburton's recent history

**ROBERT MACKENZIE**  
County Life Staff

New Year's Eve was always a special night in Dennis Casey's house growing up, but not just because of the ball drop. After midnight on Jan. 1, a steady string of phone calls would ring through the house for the next hour or two as his mother Jean booked guests for the

upcoming summer at Haliburton's Birch Point Lodge. Birch Point wouldn't let its visitors book a year in advance, so hopeful vacationers had to wait till Jan. 1 to book that summer's accommodations. "I bet you my Mom would get 20 phone calls," Casey tells me in the lounge of the Bonnie View Inn on Lake Kashagawigamog. "It became a joke over the years. People just wanted to make sure that they got the cabin that they always had."

Casey, 66, was the fourth and final generation of his family to own Birch Point when he bought it from his parents in 1986. Ten years later Casey sold the business, and by 2003 the lodge had closed for good. During the mid 20th century, Birch Point was one of 17 resorts on Kashagawigamog and Canning Lake that would fill up during the summer as families escaped to Haliburton for their vacations. But as the years

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# Birch Point was 'best experience' for teen

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wore on rising prices, cheaper international options and increasing property values helped lead to a steep decline in Haliburton's resort industry.

Today there are four lakefront homes/cottages in place of what was once the Birch Point Lodge. Neighbouring those properties to the west is the Bonnie View Inn, one of two resorts remaining on Kashagawigamog.

Casey's grandfather and great grandmother opened Birch Point in 1922, one of the first resorts on the lake and in Haliburton at that time. By the time Casey started working there as a dishwasher in the '60s, Birch Point was one of many resorts in the area where families would spend their weeks of vacation during the summer.

Tim Hagarty was a guest at Birch Point most summers from the time he was a kid until 2000, three years before it closed. After buying a cottage in Haliburton, and later moving up full time in 2010, he began putting together a history of the resorts in the area. Tim says the weeks he spent at Birch Point every summer made him feel at home and at ease.

"I can remember driving down the hill at Birch Point, even when I was an adult, and you just went 'ah, we're here,'" he says. "You didn't have to do anything. You could just sit there and look at the water, look at the trees or look at the birds and God knows what. And that, I think, was the driver, you could do whatever you wanted."

When he was young, Tim remembers going to Birch Point for \$22 a week, with three meals included in the price. Along with the food, which was "amazing," he says the people are what made the atmosphere at the resorts special. The cabins were relatively bare bones, "four walls, a couple windows, and a screened in porch if you're lucky," and it was up to the guests to make their own fun.

"The same people tended to come back at the same time, so you'd have this sort of a summer family that would get together once a year," he says. "You'd put together golf tournaments or shuffleboard tournaments, or you'd have a skit night on Friday night, dances would happen, and it was all really mostly done by the guests."



Andrea Hagarty has been working in resorts since she was 13, spending her summers at Birch Point Lodge. Hagarty has been managing the Bonnie View Inn since 1995, and has owned it since 2005. Once her daughter Macy, 14, graduates high school, Hagarty says she plans to sell Bonnie View. /ROBERT MACKENZIE Staff

Today, the state of the resort industry in Haliburton has changed. While Tim would visit Birch Point for a week or two, people nowadays are more likely to go for only a few days.

"Kids are too busy now," says Tim's niece Andrea Hagarty, owner and manager of the Bonnie View Inn. "Kids have so many after school jobs or so many sports they're in. Now you can play hockey all year, you can play soccer all year, so I find families are just so much more hectic. They can only sneak away for two or three nights, not the seven- or 14-day holidays they used to do."

Andrea has been managing the Bonnie

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# Resorts change tack with shifting economy

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View since 1995, and took ownership in 2005. She remembers going to Birch Point with her family for a week every summer when she was young. Once she turned 13, Andrea began spending her summers working at the lodge under Casey.

“Working [at Birch Point] for the summers was like the best experience I’ve ever had. And I don’t think I’d be such a good worker now if I didn’t do that then,” she says.

Andrea now works hard to adapt to changes that have damaged the Haliburton resort industry in order to keep Bonnie View afloat.

One way she’s adapted is by shifting her focus to booking weddings. Bonnie View hosted 32 weddings last year and this year is set to host another 27. Andrea says weddings are more reliable than booking a number of different guests for weekends at a time.

This is also the first year that Bonnie View isn’t offering any meal plans for guests. While the Bonnie View still runs a restaurant, Andrea estimates that about half of her guests now either make their own food or go out to places in town in order to cut costs.

According to Andrea, one of the reasons she’s put so much time and energy into running Bonnie View for all these years is the people.

“Honestly, for that rush when people are like ‘oh my gosh, that was so amazing,’ or ‘Andrea, you made our day,’ or when I see TripAdvisor and they have my name all over it. I make people happy. I love that part.” (That affection seems to go both ways, as Andrea stops to give multiple hugs to guests who are checking out while we talk.)

Another reason she’s kept the business is for her children. Running the inn has allowed her to work with both of her children and see them every day. But once her youngest child, Macy, 14, graduates high school, Andrea plans to move on from the Bonnie View, as she’s ready for a change in her lifestyle.

“I’ve always lived upstairs since I was 19. I’ve never had my own kitchen, I’ve never had my own house. I don’t even know how to cook,” she says.

If she were to sell Bonnie View, there’s a chance the resort could go the way of many before it on Kashagawigamog – torn down and turned into lake houses and cottages.

When Casey’s family bought the Birch Point property, they spent \$750 on the approximately 1,000 foot shoreline. When Birch Point was shut down and sold for good, Casey says the property was worth more than



Dysart Councillor Dennis Casey was the fourth generation of his family to own the Birch Point Lodge when he bought it from his parents in 1986. Casey first started working at Birch Point, which his great grandmother and grandfather opened in 1922, when he was about 12 years old. Today, Casey helps out Andrea Hagarty as a part-time bookkeeper at the Bonnie View Inn. /ROBERT MACKENZIE Staff

the business itself, with the four lots it stood on selling for more than \$1 million in the end.

“That’s really to me, in my mind, what did the resort industry in. Those that were struggling on prime pieces of property said ‘Enough of this nonsense. Here’s some guy here with a cheque for a million or two million or whatever, I’m taking it and I’m going,’” Casey says.

Along with an increase in property value, and higher prices teamed with cheaper vacation options elsewhere have hurt operations.

There are no more \$22 weeks like Tim experienced back in the day. “Now you’re paying \$200 a week, \$300 a week, \$400 a week, \$500 a week...[The prices] had to go up,” Tim says. “And it got easier to go to Niagara Falls, or it got easier to go to Florida or god knows wherever they’re going.”

“I used to be able to guarantee that every weekend would be full all year, and I wouldn’t take weddings because I didn’t have to worry about weekends. It was always just full, but that’s changed a lot,” Andrea says. “In the winter I think people are going away a lot more. It’s so cheap to go to Cuba or Dominican. And for my prices in the winter, people expect it to be cheaper

than in the summer, but my hydro bill in the winter is \$15,000 a month so I can’t make it cheaper.”

Despite all these challenges, Andrea believes she has seen a bit of a shift at the Bonnie View over the past three years, with people her age who experienced these local resorts as children starting to bring up the families they now have. For those who do have nostalgia for the time they used to spend in resorts around the lake, Andrea has collected a number of relics from Birch Point since it closed: from their candy cabinet and tea sets, to even buying a couple of the lodge’s cabins.

Another memory from the Birch Point is Casey, who now does part-time bookkeeping for Andrea at Bonnie View while he serves as a Dysart councillor.

Casey doesn’t believe that Haliburton resorts are a dying business, but he says in order for them to run it takes someone like Andrea who can pick up quickly on trends that appeal to her guests and also provide the traditional principles that attracted people to the lake’s resorts in the first place.

“All my life growing up in the resort, my grandfather said that if you kept it clean, you served good food and it was comfortable, people would come back. And that’s what I always worked on,” Casey says. “Andrea’s basically done...that work. She’s kept it clean, it’s comfortable, serves good food. This isn’t a fancy place but it’s full, and I think that’s the reason why.”

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