Fallen Leaf Lake – an opening without controversy

By Kathryn Reed

FALLEN LEAF LAKE – Not a cloud in the sky – it's a bluebird day. Boats fill the slips. Children run around; some getting wetter than their parents would like. Ice cream is one of the most sought after items in the store. Hikers are in short-sleeves. Those from off the hill are the ones in the turtlenecks on a day like this. Unfamiliar drivers wonder what kind of road they are on – some of the potholes seem as wide as the narrow, mostly one-lane road.

It must be Fallen Leaf Lake.

With the bevy of activity going on, evidence of all of the unrest and name-calling that went on during the winter at this small mountain enclave on the outskirts of South Lake Tahoe is well hidden.



Fallen Leaf Lake from the back counter at the store. Photos/Kathryn Reed

The worst thing, and some would argue the best, is the store ran out of food Saturday and had to borrow from its neighbors

– Stanford Sierra Camp.

Rob and Sandy Wirth took over the concessionaire this season, with this being their first weekend to be open.

“We’ve had lots of compliments,” Sandy Wirth said in between helping customers at the store.

Stephanie Bryan and Mona Brauer looked around the outside before going in. They commented on the outdoor teak tables, giving them their approval.

“The store feels more open. You don’t feel like you have to squeeze between the aisles,” Brauer said after perusing the inside.

Bryan owns a house at the lake, while Brauer is an occasional guest at the lake. Neither frequents the store a ton, but they like being able to pick something up they may have forgotten and they like to browse the T-shirt selection.

The Wirths opened the interior of the store by pushing one of the coolers to a wall, and bringing the shirt and hat selection toward the middle of the store.

It’s clear on Day 2 of being open that all the shelves are not stocked. That was planned. A variety of sundries, fishing goods, some fresh produce, mixings for s’mores and other items are available. More will be added.

The menu choices will also grow as the season takes off. For now, burgers, sandwiches, soup and ice cream are the staples. Vegetarians will be accommodated as summer truly unfolds.

The Wirths are working on securing their beer and wine license so people can have a cocktail.

On the back deck are two old sugar pine slabs that have been turned into counters.

Mother Nature didn’t help the Fallen Leaf Lake opening. It was snowing in Lake Tahoe this past week. Piles of snow had to be cleared from the area. A team of about 20 volunteers helped get the docks in the water and grounds looking as though it’s been spring in the mountains for more than two days.

Ted Wendell spent about four hours in a wetsuit cleaning the lakeshore of debris.

General Manager Tom Barnes is walking around the docks with a clipboard on Saturday in the late afternoon. He is smiling.

He points to Rob Wirth with a rake in his hand on the shore making sure the sand is just right. He calls the people by name who are helping make sure opening weekend comes off without a hitch – people who are volunteering their time.

Barnes talks a bit about what it’s been like since coming on board last August. He doesn’t want to badmouth anyone, but he said things had not been as well kept as they could have been.

At the morning community meeting at the firehouse, resident Tom Beales sang the praises of the Wirths and commended them for their efforts in getting things going in such a short period of time. (The Wirths had six weeks to get the site ready, having taken over for the John and Ruth Rich who had the concessionaire job for the last 14 years.)

Rob Wirth gave a brief presentation to the board and nearly 50 people at Saturday’s meeting. He told them about the two electric boats the marina has for rent – and that had already been plying the glass-like morning water.

A couple aluminum fishing boats are also new.

Gas is selling for $3.99 a gallon. That wasn’t stopping people from churning through the dark, cold waters that sit on the edge of Desolation Wilderness.

Wirth even said he would deliver food to the firehouse. This

may be good news for Gary Gerren; the board hired him that day to be the fire chief.

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