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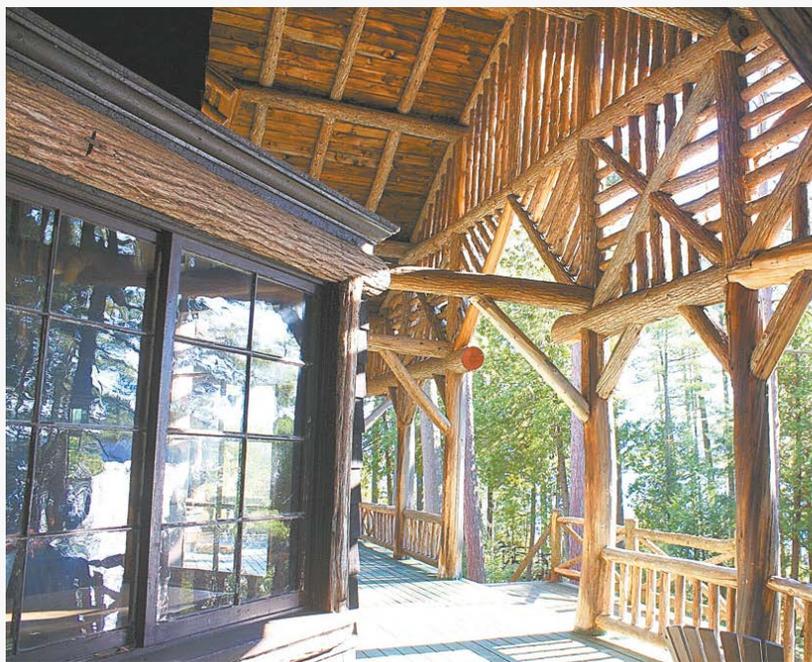
Friends of Eagle Island progresses with camp

LOCAL NEWS

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The Main Lodge of the summer camp, built in 1903, at Eagle Island in Upper Saranac Lake in November 2015. (Photo provided by Paula McGovern, Friends of Eagle Island)

SARANAC LAKE — The Friends of Eagle Island is moving forward to re-establish the children's summer camp, with an anticipated soft opening in summer 2018.

The Santa Clara town board recently amended

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the local Land Use Code to allow group camping on the island, which opened doors for fund development and partnerships, Executive Director Paula McGovern said.

The nonprofit organization had been in discussions with the board and took on a petition process to get the code amended, according to a press release. The town passed a resolution on Jan. 12 adopting the amendment with restrictions to limit the use to *“historic uses,”* which include traditional summer camp, family camp, work and women’s weekends, low impact water activities and limited/scheduled access for historic tours.

It would not be a Girl Scout camp, as it was for seven decades until 2008, but would serve as a youth camp for kids to learn about the Adirondacks as well as participate in activities including sailing, canoeing, swimming, High Peaks climbing and longer camping trips.

FEI was also recently awarded a \$498,825 grant through the 2016 state Regional Economic Development Awards for the preservation and restoration of the camp.

“We’ve gotten an awful lot accomplished in a little over a year,” McGovern said. *“We’ve gotten the land use approval. It’s gotten a lot more money through individual donations and through this grant from the state, which is incredible in two ways. Obviously it’s money, a half a million dollars towards the renovations, but of course it also shows the state believes in the value of this island and the historic value of*

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the camps.”

McGovern said the organization has started to work with the grant office to design a step-by-step plan for spending the money, but will use it specifically for historic restoration and infrastructure.

The group was also awarded a \$10,000 grant in October by the National Trust for Historic Preservation from the Hart Family Fund for Small Towns. The grant will be used to match local funds to support architectural drawings for the project.

The camp still has a lot of work to do to get up and running, including a new water supply system, septic upgrades, a new electric supply, foundation work, new roofs and kitchen upgrades, which will total approximately \$1.5 million.

“We’re continuing our fundraising, and we’ve got a lot of long-term supporters,” McGovern said. *“Again, having this land use approval, some supporters were kind of waiting on that, so it’s all good stuff right now. We’re really ready to move forward full speed ahead.”*

McGovern said currently the group is in the preliminary design phase of setting up the water supply system. The organization had drilled for wells but came up dry, so it will implement a system to take and filter water from the lake.

The organization drilled for the wells in two locations at the request of the state Department of Health and because the recurring

maintenance costs of a well system would have been lower than a surface water system.

FEI may be able to use minor components of the previous lake water system, but the preliminary engineering cost estimate for constructing the new system exceeds \$250,000.

The group is working with the state Department of Environmental Conservation and Adirondack Park Agency, as well as other agencies to progress various projects, she said.

McGovern said she is looking forward to reopening the camp to resume low-environmental-impact programming as it should have many benefits to the community.

“One, it gives the kids the opportunity to learn about the Adirondacks, learn about nature, learn about the environment,” she said. “It will also provide jobs for the local economy. Young people could be staff as counselors and advisors. And also as a national historic landmark, it’ll let people be able to see this unique facility with a unique history.”

Eagle Island is a 30-acre property located on Upper Saranac Lake. It was designed in 1903 by architect William Coulter for Levi Morton, former New York governor and U.S. vice president under President Benjamin Harrison.

In 1910, Morton sold the camp to industrialist Henry Graves from Orange, New Jersey, who gifted the property to the Girl Scouts of the Oranges in 1937. Campers used the island from 1938 until 2008, as the local New Jersey Girl

Scout council decided to discontinue its use in 2009 and sell the camp in 2010.

The camp was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1986, and in 2004 the property was named a National Historic Landmark.

FEI purchased the island in November 2015 from the Girl Scouts Heart of New Jersey Council for \$2.45 million through the contribution of an anonymous donor.