

BACK ^{TO} NATURE



The families behind In the Pines. From left: Heather and Charlie Greene, their son, Dalton and dog Rollie; Bryan and Jessie Judge and their girls Porter and Fallon; Joe and Kelley Delvecchio and their children Jack and Charlotte; and Joe and Theresa Judge with their dog Teddy.



Coming soon to Bolivia, In the Pines RV & Cabin Village is the culmination of a family's rediscovery of the great outdoors.

BY ANNESOPHIA RICHARDS | PHOTOGRAPHY BY MEGAN DEITZ

Bryan Judge didn't grow up in a camping family. In fact, his only childhood memory of camping was the one trip cut short when his parents changed their minds and packed back up before he or his siblings even got to spend the night. Growing up, Bryan enjoyed being outside and playing sports, but the thought of sleeping in a tent surrounded by nature simply had no appeal.

Yet now, as he and his family prepare to open In the Pines RV & Cabin Village in Bolivia, he understands just how much the outdoors can really change a person's perspective.

Bryan grew up in Kernersville and met his wife, Jessie, while attending East Carolina University. Upon graduating, the couple travelled abroad to South Korea, and together they taught English for one year. Afterward, the couple returned to North Carolina, finally settling in

Brunswick County, where Bryan spent the next decade as owner and operator of several Snap-On Tool franchises. Although he initially enjoyed his work, it began to take its toll and his desire for a change grew stronger.

"I felt very stuck at the time, and even though it was a good living I worried I'd be doing Snap-On my whole life, which I didn't want because I was never really into tools or cars," Bryan says. "I just got burned out and wanted to prove I could do something else."





CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS

Around that same time, Bryan remembers coming across a documentary on TV of a couple who renovated a school bus and went on a cross-country adventure with their dog. Yearning to experience that sort of freedom, Bryan felt confident he could pull an RV even though he'd never been in one. He presented the idea to Jessie, who was at first taken back by her husband's seemingly out-of-character idea but soon found herself excited to embark on the adventure of a lifetime with him, their young daughters Fallon and Porter and their two dogs in tow.

"My family didn't do a whole lot of camping growing

up either, but my mom homeschooled us and we were always outside," Jessie says. "I'd already been talking to Bryan for a while about minimalizing and downsizing, telling him we didn't need a house as big as we had and saying we should simplify for a couple of years, so when he watched this one documentary, I guess it was just what he needed to hear at the time."

Setting their plan in motion, Bryan began selling his Snap-On franchises after Hurricane Florence, and in the summer of 2019 the couple sold their home, bought and moved into their new fifth-wheel RV, and got on the road. For the next eight months, the Judges travelled across the country from Maine to California. Along the way they stayed at a range of locations, from large, franchised RV parks and small mom-and-pop campgrounds to state parks, national parks and everywhere in between.

"I realized pretty quickly that it didn't matter where we were or what time of year we were there, all these RV parks seemed to have a great sense of community where everyone was friendly and seemed to be having a good time," Bryan says.

The experience of living light and keeping things simple grounded the Judges, who say they rediscovered what was important to them as a family. No longer bogged down by the

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demands and distractions that had occupied them in the past, the couple felt closer to each other, their children and to the natural beauty around them.

“We had the most fun with the girls when there weren’t all these things to do, and we would just sit by the fire chatting with the people we met and letting the kids play with each other and other kids,” Jessie says. “It felt nice to connect with people in a way that a

lot of times we don’t do anymore, and just being outside and having fun.”

Those several months of full-time RV living sparked an idea for Bryan, and before long he and Jessie were planning their next adventure — owning and operating their own family campground. The couple and their children returned to their home state of North Carolina just as the world was shutting down due to the pandemic, but that didn’t stop them from putting their plan in motion.

“I spoke with my dad about the idea, we began looking into property, and I started talking to Brunswick County about parcel requirements so we knew we were looking at something that would work out,” Bryan says. “My dad thought maybe we could do this as a family if we all came in together, so we decided to bring my two sisters and their husbands in as part of it.”

By the end of 2020, the Judges had found the perfect spot for their campground, a 40-acre pine tree farm off N.C. Highway 87 in Bolivia. Then began the hard part: securing architects and engineers, waiting on permit approvals and reconciling financial projections made at the start of the pandemic with the ever-increasing costs they encountered as time went on.

“The struggle of getting permits approved and people lined up dragged out the process, so between the time frame and the price increase, if we didn’t have the full support of our family being in on it together, we might have had second thoughts,” Bryan says. “Knowing we’re committed to this and there’s no turning back or other option but to see this through, that’s what’s kept us going.”

The first phase of the park includes the development of the front 20 acres, leaving the back 20 acres untouched. Guests can choose from the campground’s 30 full-hookup RV sites

or eight cabins, with tent spots planned in the next phase. The property will include an office, multipurpose building, store, showers, bathrooms and a boat and RV storage area. The campground will also offer recreational activities such as a pool, playground, dog park, walking trails, corn hole and kayak usage in the marsh creek at the back of the property.

“Our vision has always been focused around community, nature and the outdoors, because that’s what’s important to us,” Bryan says. “We wanted to create a destination where people can come and socialize, and that’s reflected in the layout of the park, as everything is wrapped around the clubhouse where the pool, community firepits and leisure games will be. We’ll eventually want to have food trucks and live music too, things that bring people together.”

“We’d also like to have some animals out there, and for the campground to have a laid-back, comfortable vibe,” Jessie adds. “We spaced the RV sites out so they’re not on top of each other, because we want it to feel more woody and less commercial.”

For the Judges, family is the inspiration and motivation behind everything they have in store at In the Pines. With the help of Bryan’s parents, sisters, brothers-in-law and all the kids, the couple can’t wait to share the joys of camping with others.


“We hope the campground becomes a generational part of our lives and something we can pass on to our kids,” Bryan says. “Everyone in our family is excited about it, and we can’t wait to see other families out there having a good time and know we were able to have part in making that happen.” ■

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