

When bad things happen to good people-- Man turns love of nature

At the age of five, Matt Brown, Milwaukee, was visiting his aunt's home. As curious as a five-year-old can be, he discovered an unlocked electrical box while playing outside. Matt's life forever changed when he reached inside the box and was severely burned.

His mother, Donna Brown, recalls the accident well. The date was Oct. 2, 1990 and Matt suffered severe burns to his left arm and his right arm just past the elbow. The electricity exited through his abdomen and left a five-inch hole. Matt lost both of his arms and has endured over a dozen surgeries. "He is a remarkable child. I admire him tremendously for his outlook on life," said Donna.

Matt loves the outdoors and nature. "I never liked the city and that drew me to look at the property I first purchased as an ag and tree farm in 2001," he said. "I loved the area, I love the outdoors, and it is close to larger metropolitan areas. That farm Matt purchased has now grown into a multi-million dollar complex known as Pine Ridge Farms that sits on over 500 acres.

Pine Ridge offers bird hunts, sporting clays, guided fishing, walking paths, and more and is an exclusive hunting lodge so sportsmen can come for a day or a week. All of the activities offered are those that Matt enjoys the most. "I love the great outdoors and all that it offers," said Matt.

The lodge opened in 2002. Their most recent expansion of 22,000 sq. ft. of an expanded dining, banquet, and lounge facility opened in February 2005. The banquet hall seats up to 350 people. For classroom style seminars and meetings, it can accommodate up to 400. The addition makes it possible for Pine Ridge Farms to host parties from 20 to 350 people. They are booked for many small private wedding parties of under 50 people and many larger weddings. Whether a bridal shower, birthday party, small wedding party, the Pintail Pub and private meeting area is a perfect venue and is available seven days a week. You can plan your party with food that is plated or buffet and is available in every meeting room in the complex.

Donna said that Wautoma has welcomed the family to the area and has been very helpful. "Whenever possible we support area businesses and we are pleased to be a part of the Wautoma community," said Donna. "They are always willing to help and have supported our venture."

When you mention food to Jeremy Thoren, the Executive Chef, his mind immediately goes into "we can do it mode." Chef Thoren has been on staff at Pine Ridge for over a year and loves the spacious kitchen facility in the new addition. "I like cooking everything, but especially enjoy wild game, which is unique to this restaurant," said Thoren. "Our new menu coming out in May will include elk, bison, and additional game bird entrees. Presently they are also baking all their own breads including honey wheat and sourdough that melt in your mouth. Thoren added that soon they will also be making loaves of bread and hope to also sell some of their bakery.

No meal would be complete without desserts and Pine Ridge makes five signature desserts including: Chocolate trilogy, lemon meringue pie, strawberry country cake, creme caramel, and mixed berry eclairs.

Chef Thoren completed three years of culinary arts apprenticeship and worked for Bergstrom Hotels for five years before joining the staff at Pine Ridge Farms. He has over 10 years of culinary experience.

The new lounge area with a full service bar and bar menu is open from 4 p.m. to midnight Tuesday through Sunday. The bar menu is served from 3 to 9 p.m. and happy hour is held from 4-6:30 p.m. Tuesday through Friday.

The restaurant is open Tuesday through Saturday for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Breakfast is served from 6-11 a.m., lunch from 11 a.m.-3 p.m., and dinner from 5-9 p.m. Sunday breakfast is served from 6-11 a.m., lunch from 11 a.m.-3 p.m., and brunch from 8 a.m.-2 p.m. On special holidays, Pine Ridge serves an extended menu brunch.

The banquet hall is managed by Rebecca Thoren, food and beverage manager, and Jan Timm, special events coordinator. If you have dreamed your ideal party, Pine Ridge Farms is equipped to make it happen.

Susan McComb, the Gift Shop Manager/owner, is very excited about moving the gift shop into the farmhouse on the property by Memorial Day weekend. "We do offer our own brand of candles that are made in Wisconsin, handmade items, Gooseberry Patch, the Jim Shore line and we will be adding Willow Tree, a Christmas room, fun items for Red Hat Ladies, greeting cards, and more," said Susan. "We also



Pine Ridge Farms owner Matt Brown and his mother Donna, Pine Ridge Farms president, stand outside their establishment, which is located on Hwy. 73 just west of Wautoma.

have a line of packaged food, 'Papa Pat's' that is made by the disabled and handicapped. I thought the Papa Pat's was a great line to handle considering how my brother Matt has persevered to overcome his disabilities."

Pine Ridge Farms, Inc. is more than a corporation; it is a family affair. Matt, in his early twenties, is the owner. Donna Brown, the mom, is the president. David McComb, brother-in-law, is the vice president. Paul Brown, brother, is the operations manager. Susan McComb, sister, is the gift shop manager and Christine Perez, sister, comes to assist on a limited basis. Matt's cousin, Greg Hintz, is the dog trainer, hunting guide, and the general outside maintenance man. On each of the family business cards it says: "Adding a Touch of Class to the Outdoors." The Brown family is what America is about and how special it is that Pine Ridge Farms, Inc. is a part of Wautoma.



An original Sam Timm painting of the farmhouse sits on the mantle in the lounge. The farmhouse will be the home of the new gift shop opening soon.



Executive Chef Jeremy Thoren displays one of many unique menu items available at Pine Ridge.



The dining room offers a comfortable environment that is ideal for a perfect night out.

--Love, courage, and determination prevail into Pine Ridge Farms, Inc.

Garden vision unfolds at Pine Ridge Farms

Work has begun on a northern woods garden that will include, just for starters, an artistic pond, marsh area, pine wildflower walkways, a wild flower meadow, perennial gardens, and water gardens. This work-in-progress is coming from the vision, sweat labor, and commitment of Pine Ridge Farms, Pioneer Floral, John Newton Design, and Dale Harvey, an international gardening expert.

After the expansion of the restaurant and banquet facilities, Pine Ridge Farms next looked to the design of gardens located in a gently rolling sweep of land outlined by a ridge of pine trees that diners and lodgers view from windows, patios, and log decking. Planning began over a year ago and continues as the garden takes shape.

The contingent of garden builders on this project is an impressive one. Matt Brown, owner of Pine Ridge Farms, and company president Donna Brown both committed to this huge undertaking, wanting to continue the vision of providing outstanding outdoor experiences to facility guests, diners, and the general public. They brought in Pioneer Floral, Wautoma. Owner of the garden center, Marie Kraemer, whose late husband Ray was the long-time superintendent for the Milwaukee Horticulture Domes, has embraced the project. Her daughter Carol Kraemer took Dale Harvey out to the site last summer while he was here from his home in New Zealand. And that was the beginning of the gardens that will incorporate, by the time they are developed, 15 to 20 semi-loads of trees, shrubs, perennials, annuals, mulch, and other materials.

"This will be a world-class garden," said Harvey, known as New Zealand's "Garden Guru." "This will bring people from all over the world to see a northern woods garden. It is on the scale of the Hotel Otani gardens in Tokyo. The same size and form, those gardens are a sanctuary in the middle of downtown Tokyo. Here, these gardens will showcase what the northern woods offers and people will come from all over to see it."

Harvey lives in Auckland, New Zealand, but returns every year to the Wautoma area where he spent part of his childhood. He has been a major player in

garden design and promotion of gardening as a social change agent throughout the world. His time spent in Japan included a Japan-United States Friendship Commission/National Endowment for the Arts, Washington, D.C. full fellowship as an international garden artist and he worked there as an environmental craftsman and consultant. During one stay, he uncovered an ancient buried garden that was considered a candidate for national treasure status.

Using gardening for social change, Harvey has promoted community gardens for over a decade and began school projects that incorporate gardening into teaching children how to care for the earth.

He sees the Pine Ridge Farms gardens having the potential to draw people to the beauty of the natural state of the northwoods while creating a showcase of native and hybrid flowers and shrubs, all the while connecting them to the earth and nature.

Thanks to the Internet, Pioneer Floral's Carol Kraemer was able to coordinate the design of the garden with Harvey in anticipation of the work, which has now begun. She used e-mail to exchange ideas, build color schemes, assemble a list of plants that would be used, and, step by step, organize and manage what will be a summer-long project this year, but that will also continue into coming years.

"This design is on-going," Carol said. "The project is the biggest Pioneer has ever done. It's overwhelming, but exciting. I'm having so much fun working with Dale and John. We're like peas in a pod, throwing ideas around."

Pioneer Floral was established in 1942 and the Kraemers have owned it for the last 21 years. Harvey classifies it as one of the finest nurseries in the United States and it is supplying the multitudes of plants, trees, shrubs, perennials and annuals that will be used in this year-round attraction.

The Pine Ridge garden design encompasses all seasons. Harvey's partner, John Newton, owner of John Newton Design, is known for his garden light displays. Born in Australia, but now living in New Zealand, Newton,



Pine Ridge garden designers John Newton and Dale Harvey discuss the best location for these plants.

along with Harvey, has created the internationally known "Quarter Acre Paradise" in Auckland. The showcase garden is the model for New Zealanders, or "Kiwis," to turn their own small spaces into spectacular gardens. The Quarter Acre Paradise Christmas light show has been featured in numerous magazines and TV shows including tourist media on CNN. Newton is designing the lighting for the Pine Ridge garden that will enhance the outdoor area even throughout the cold Wisconsin winters.

"The only difference developing this Wisconsin garden to gardens in New Zealand is the climate," said Newton. "Well, and the wildlife. We don't have whitetail deer to contend with in New Zealand."

Newton called the Pine Ridge project a legacy garden and commended the owners for having the foresight needed to take on such work.

"A garden tells a lot about a person," he said. "Pine Ridge is a vision stretching out over the next 25 years and more."

The work-in-progress garden will have over 1,000 trees and shrubs planted by the end of this June. The developers are capitalizing on native species or hybrids of native species.

"Americans often don't appreciate their beautiful native plants," said Harvey. "Growers in Europe have actually hybridized many native plants that Americans sometimes refer to as weeds. Here at Pine Ridge we'll be using numerous native and native hybrids. Golden rod has over 100 hybrids, from white to golden to red. New England Astor, liatris or blazing star, rudbeckia, and many more will be part of this garden."

Harvey compares the building of this garden to the building of a house. Blueprints of such a garden would identify each square yard laid out and planted with one to two plants that flower each season. The soil lays the foundation for the garden "house" and much care goes into building a healthy, strong foundation. Trees provide the framework, starting with the ridge of pine and moving to the newly planted, young trees. The trees also create the ceiling of the natural, outdoor room with their overhanging canopy. Then, says Harvey, the furniture is moved in with the shrubbery of varying texture, color, and form. Flowering perennials and annuals as well as ground cover are the accessories to this glorious natural home with sod serving as the carpet.

While this outdoor garden is just

beginning, Pine Ridge's operations manager, Paul Brown, has already planted 23 acres of wild flowers on the 550 acre property and has plans to do more. He works with J&J Aquatics out of Saxeville to obtain the pounds and pounds of seeds needed for the meadow and prairie areas.

Pine Ridge is using as many local businesses as possible in the construction of these gardens. Besides J&J Aquatics, Zillges Spa, Landscape and Fireplace out of Redgranite is doing the mulch and rock. Egbert's did the excavating.

"We want this to have as much local involvement as possible," said Donna. "Our goal is to have an inviting, relaxing place for people to come to visit or to stay for awhile."

The outdoor acreage also has a labyrinth laid out with field stones. According to the website lessons4living.com, "a labyrinth is an ancient symbol that relates to wholeness. It combines the imagery of the circle and the spiral into a meandering but purposeful path. The Labyrinth represents a journey to our own center and back again out into the world."

"Labyrinths have long been used as meditation and prayer tools."

Visitors start on the maze-like path of the labyrinth and follow the stone pattern, weaving in and out, focusing on their movement and using it to meditate or relax from other pressures and stresses in their lives.

"Our labyrinth is an outdoor experience," said Donna. "It's the way a labyrinth should be walked, with the up and down terrain reflecting the ups and downs of life and experienced out in nature."

Pine Ridge also has plans to place keystones around the property. These stones will line up with natural events like the rising of the sun on the solstice, much like Stonehenge in England. The facility will use global positioning to place the markers.

Already an experience in itself, visiting Pine Ridge Farms will take on a whole new dimension as the new gardens develop.

"We are re-creating God's garden," said Dale Harvey. "It will be an aurora of changing color. It will be something that Wautoma and Waushara County can be proud of. It will bring this area international attention as time goes by."

Pine Ridge invites the public to view the gardens. For more information, call (920) 787-5519. For more information about Quarter Acre Paradise, go to daleharvey.co.nz.



Mona Vnuk and Donna Burns plant some vegetation along the shoreline of the pond at Pine Ridge Farms.