

The History of the Bamboo Bar

The Bamboo Bar is the only bar on the shore of Shawano Lake. Its reputation is known far and wide as a friendly place to come for a drink or a bite to eat. Whether you come by car or boat it is a great place to enjoy an adult beverage, food, talk fishing, old times and see old faces.

Prior to 1940 there was no development on the south shore of Shawano Lake. The St. Paul Eastern and Grand Trunk Railway Company purchased a right of way, dated October 19, 1886, and built railroad tracks from Shawano to Gillette. The Chicago and Northwestern Railway Company later acquired ownership of the right of way, abandoned the tracks, and sold it to Shawano County on August 4, 1937, to build an access road along part of the south shore of Shawano Lake. It later was expanded to become, and still is, State Highway 22. The land for Cedar Avenue was deeded to the Town of Wescott on July 6, 1942.

October 19, 1942 was the original date Fred Miller purchased the property that became the Bamboo Bar. Fred (Fuzzy) Miller built the bar in 1946 after returning from WWII and called it Fuzzy Miller's Resort. The original size was a 16 by 25-foot bar area with living quarters behind. Fuzzy and his wife, Sarah, owned and operated Fuzzy Miller's Resort for 17 years and then sold the bar to Bernard and Rachel Karcz on April 15, 1963.

Bernie renamed the bar Bernie's Bamboo Bar and remodeled and added additional area on the lake side of the bar. He also added an addition to the bar and living quarters on the west side of the building. They operated it until August 14, 1968, when they sold it to Leonard and Ida Koehler. The Koehlers had the bar for two and one-half years and it was then acquired by Jerry and Marty Olsen on May 13, 1971.

Jerry and Marty Olsen owned and operated the Bamboo Bar and Bait Shop for 24 years. The bar originally had only a beer license and 18 year olds were able to drink legally. It was during this time that it became quite well known around the state. Jerry and Marty were parents, advisors, confessors, and guardians to a whole generation of Shawano County's up and coming citizens.

Jerry was quite the promoter and promoted boat-sinking contests, beach parties, fishing derbies, and every other type of promotion you could imagine. The Shawano Ski Sharks Water Show was organized in 1976 and originally performed on

Shawano Lake in front of the Bamboo Bar. The local radio stations and Green Bay television stations called for the latest fishing conditions and to get the results of Jerry's daily fishing excursions on Shawano Lake. The Bamboo Bar and Bait Shop was "the place to be" on Shawano Lake.

Age and Mother Nature took a toll on Jerry's health and Joe Montour took over the bar from Jerry and Marty on January 23, 1996.

Joe decided to establish his own identity on the bar and named it the Sunset Grill from a picture that was taken in front of the bar from the water's edge one beautiful summer evening. Joe continued many of the activities started at the old Bamboo Bar and added many innovative ideas in his tenure at the Shawano Lake landmark.

Keanne Lohmiller took over stewardship of the bar in 2007 and took on a partner, Rick Heyrman, in May 2008. Keanne continued to run the bar until January 2010 when he left to operate a bar in North Platte, Nebraska. Rick Heyrman leased the Sunset Grill to Brian "Sparky" Steichen, who operated the south shore Shawano Lake landmark until April 2016.

On May 18, 2016, a group of four investors acquired the Sunset Grill from Rick Heyrman. The four owners, Tim Day, Jeff Puissant, Dan DeChamps and Bob Meyers, spent two months doing extensive repairs and renovations to the over 70-year old building with the hopes of restoring this Shawano Lake institution to its roots. In July 2016, after completing the renovations, they leased the property to Jeff and Tammy Stachowiak and Rory Burns, who once again began operating the property as the Bamboo Bar.

At the time, Jerry Olsen could still be seen "holding court" at the Bamboo Bar as legendary fisherman, storyteller, and historian of the local area. Most late afternoons you could find Jerry having an "adult beverage", for medicinal purposes, during "attitude adjustment". Unfortunately, Jerry's health issues finally caught up with him and he passed away in June 2017. Jerry will be sorely missed by the many people who had a special bond with him.

The Bamboo Bar is still the place to get a drink, something to eat, launch your boat, and find out where the fish are biting. Why not join management, the friendly bartenders, and a gang of regulars at the Bamboo Bar for a time to remember?!

Special thanks to Ron Schumacher for providing the story and history of the Bamboo Bar.