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## RELEASE

### Twin Lakes Park: Updating and Adapting Services to Change

**Long Lake Township, MI** – Nestled at the base of Long Lake Township on North Twin Lake, approximately five miles west of downtown Traverse City, is Twin Lakes Park. Under the stewardship of Grand Traverse County Parks and Recreation, the often quiet park is suddenly experiencing a resurgence of visitors and facility rental customers. “This community treasure is really being noticed now,” says Parks and Recreation Director Kristine Erickson, “because it offers recreational opportunities in a peaceful, picturesque environment, and its facilities are large enough to accommodate events under current gathering guidelines.”

While Erickson refers to Gilbert Lodge (named after the late Probate Court Judge Parm Gilbert) as the park’s “crown jewel,” this property, she says, offers much more. A commercial-grade kitchen adjoins the lodge, along with a caretaker’s cottage. There is an outdoor picnic pavilion, a dormitory with a meeting room, a dance studio, rental cabins, a playground, multipurpose field, two miles of hiking trails, a lake well-stocked with bluegill, bass and trout, and a popular beachfront – until now. This spring, the beach and walkway along the breakwall completely disappeared under high water. According to Erickson, that is just one of many natural and manmade physical changes that have shaped the property during the past 79 years.

The park was born of Judge Gilbert’s vision in 1941 when he acquired and donated to the county a 25-acre section of land on North Twin Lake. In 1947, funds were raised to construct a lodge and ten cabins for sleeping quarters, and in 1948, the lodge was built and dedicated. Between 1941 and 1972, Gilbert and others, including the Oleson Foundation, assembled and donated 90 more acres to what was then known as “Twin Lakes Camp.”

In 1952, Camp Roy-El was established by Roy and Ellen Brigman to provide a camping experience for physically disabled youngsters at Hickory Hills. In 1954, the two-week summer camp moved to Twin Lakes and continued for 40 more years, serving 795 campers and 684 “teenaiders”.

In 1966, Rotary Club donated \$4,000 for an “A-frame” housing facility. This building added 60 beds for campers.

In 1972, the county purchased 40 additional acres to expand the camp. Gilbert’s intent was for “4-H-ers” to be the primary users and developers of the camp.

In 1979, the County Board of Commissioners sanctioned the Grand Traverse County Parks and Recreation Commission, which assumed responsibility for the camp. The commission included a representative of the “Twin Lakes Camp Committee,” the group of 4-H and Camp Roy-El alumni who managed the camp. By 1983, the workload for the camp greatly increased, and the volunteer 4-H director who staffed it for years asked Parks and Recreation Commissioners to hire a county employee to take over. In April 1983, the county hired a director and, for the first time, the camp’s operational budget was placed under Parks and Recreation’s jurisdiction.

In 2008, several generous community grants were awarded to Parks and Recreation for the “Twin Lakes Waterfront Project.” The project included construction of the outdoor pavilion and a play structure, with beachfront improvements, such as the fishing platform and the breakwall.

Over the years, Twin Lakes Park has developed into a popular event venue – first favored by local families and groups who return year after year for reunions, graduations, birthday parties, and retirement celebrations, and later discovered by couples who wanted reasonably priced “destination weddings.” In 2015, Parks and

Recreation started to focus its marketing efforts on Twin Lakes Park as a wedding venue and since then, according to Erickson, over 100 have taken place there. Prior to 2015, only “a handful” of weddings were booked each year. Now, with COVID-19 restrictions and wedding cancellations due to the pandemic, Twin Lakes Park is quickly becoming an alternative venue on shorter notice because, said Erickson, “it’s the perfect place for socially distant gatherings within the guidelines, whether inside or outdoors.”

The dormitory can still host camps, visiting sports teams, and families and friends of couples who want a shared overnight or weekend stay. Organizations looking for a unique place to meet can use the dormitory meeting room.

After falling into disrepair and being neglected for years, the two remaining Twin Lakes Camp cabins have been cleaned and painted, and one is now available for overnight rental.

A long-unused portion of Gilbert Lodge’s lower level has also been cleaned, refurbished, and rented by Crystal Bindi Studio, which offers “Twin Lakes Fitness” programs such as yoga, swing yoga, bellydancing, and drumming.

Swimming at the park also has changed this year. Due to high water levels, Erickson said she recently made the “management decision” to close the beach and prohibit swimming in North Twin Lake until further notice. Following three drownings in nearly as many years in the lake, the Parks Commissioners passed a motion in 2014 to define a shallow swim area and only permit swimming within that designated area. “Today,” said Erickson, “there is no public beach and the lake drops off too quickly – a safety concern that needs to be managed.” The director said she will examine the situation further with Parks and Recreation Commissioners and possibly seek expert consultation for long-term solutions. For now, she reminded, as defined in the Twin Lakes Park Ordinance, swimming with “a wetsuit covering the torso from neck to the tops of the thighs, and constructed of 1.5 millimeters or thicker neoprene,” continues to be permitted.

For more information about the park, park facility fees, reservations, and facility gathering limits under COVID-19 guidelines, call 231-922-4818, or visit [www.grandtraverse.org/parks](http://www.grandtraverse.org/parks) on line.

Sources: Camp Roy-El history provided by Kathy Brigman Woods; Twin Lakes’ history and timeline from Parks and Recreation records and former caretakers’ documents.

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## TWIN LAKES PARK

