

HONEY CREEK RESORT STATE PARK

FROM THE GROUND UP

By Dan Ehl - Managing editor

"This is still a state park," says Terry Montgomery of the Honey Creek Resort State Park, "not a gated resort. That's the big message."

The Iowa Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) project administrator for the resort stressed that though the 105-room lodge would be catering to visitors from throughout the Midwest, the numerous activities and park facilities will be tailored to draw from surrounding communities as well.

Montgomery added that the park will also look to be partnering with area businesses and groups to offer programs and services not provided by the state.

Ryan Ferris, Hansen Construction project manager, says subcontractor crews are working two shifts, six days a week. Five to seven subcontractors with more than 50 employees are at the site at any one time.

Michelle Wilson, an IDNR executive officer from the central office in Des Moines, works with state park interpreters from all over the state. She says that they plan to have numerous programs geared for both lodge guests and area residents.

Aimed at families, they hope to create events at the park that will act as "gateway" experiences for youth that will draw them further into outdoor

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An initial shooting sport, says Montgomery, will be archery, with that expanding in time.

Planned is a roofed, fenced structure on the dock where families can fish. In the center will be a circular opening to the lake surrounded by chairs. He said that with the shade provided by the dock, as well as the creation



of an underwater environment, fish will be drawn to the site. Fishing can also be done from the sides of the "fishing house."

Fishing lessons will also be given to first-timers.

On the paths will be raised platforms to better view migrating birds on the lake and other wildlife. Blinds will also dot the trails that will allow visitors to have close encounters with animals such as deer.

Wilson says that they also hope to partner with surrounding county conservation departments so that their personnel can hold programs at the park.



Other area outdoor enthusiasts such as birders will be asked to give programs.

Interpretive signs with both graphics and texts will allow hikers to learn about the outdoors even without guides.

Some people, especially those from urban areas, says Wilson, are hesitant at trying such things as fishing. The park's goal is that after having such experiences at the park, guests will go home wanting to do such activities on their own. After viewing all the birds at the park she gives as another example, the visitors will want to put up bird feeders in their own back yard or hike in their own nearby parks.

Many urban residents have never really clearly seen the stars or sat around a camp fire at night roasting marshmallows and telling ghost stories. Near the lodge will be a large fire pit where visitors can have such experiences, says Montgomery.

Wilson noted that some parks have natural Fourth of July fireworks where visitors unused to the outdoors can watch fire flies. Activities such as these, admitted Wilson, might seem "kind of weird" to rural residents.

The park will also offer a bird cleaning facility in the lodge's maintenance building for hunters.

Designed as a "destination park," the goal is to attract families for more than just a weekend visit - with some staying at the lodge, cabins and RV parks for up to a week. With the right kind of marketing, says Wilson, area communities will be able to draw these visitors for "day trips" - shopping and other events and attractions. They hope more local activities such as "Summer Splash"

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John Probasco
Broker

Email: Info@WeberRealEstate.com
Internet: www.WeberRealEstate.com