

Resort creates fantasy to celebrate yuletide



Pegasus horses, with eight-foot wing spans, are suspended from the atrium in the lobby of the Grand Traverse Resort as part of its Northwoods Fantasy Holiday.

By Armand Gebert
special writer

Grand Traverse Resort Village ... This is a place that would even melt the heart of old Scrooge. This holiday season the resort village, located six miles north of Traverse City, is wrapped in glitter and magic, thanks to resort president Paul Nice, who nipped \$240,000 into Christmas lights and decorations for his "playground."

The village — rated four stars by Mobil and four diamonds by AAA — is lit up by 150,000 miniature lights, spaced across 4 1/4 miles of electrical cord. It's transformed the resort into what some of the locals call "the big sparkle."

Nine, a 48-year-old lawyer-entrepreneur, spared neither his wallet, his staff's efforts or himself for his Northwoods Fantasy Holiday. The fantasy is the latest talk in what was once a quiet, small and inconspicuous residential resort area, now an elegant tourist Mecca that sprawls across a 920-acre site and boasts 750 rooms, suites and condominium villas.

The idea of the "big sparkle" was conceived more than a year ago. It's geared to operate for only four weekends in December, including Christmas.

"We wanted and got the best, the ultimate," Nice said recently, ticking off some of the individual projects that made it possible — interior and exterior lighting designers and 500 hours of installation, plus another 100 or so hours to install the herds of illuminated deer.

THERE ALSO were auditions and interviews with candidate producers to create an original Christmas musical revue featuring New York and Los Angeles talents, and artists-instructors to teach guests how to make stained-glass ornaments.

"We work hard to produce fun and relaxation," he said.

The result is a weekend package which ranges in price from \$135 to \$165 per person, depending on the type of accommodations selected.

The price includes a ticket to the Northwoods Fantasy Holiday dinner musical, a Sunday brunch, a class in stained-glass ornament making, sto-

ry hours for children, use of the health club facilities (two indoor swimming pools, whirlpools, saunas and weight rooms), free parking and free shuttle bus service to and from the nearby Cherry Capital Airport.

A fresh northern Michigan Douglas fir wreath, boxed and ready for travel, is presented to departing guests.

There are court time fees for four indoor tennis courts and four racquetball courts.

Twinkling opulence bathes visitors even before being welcomed at the compound's main building, the Tower, a 17-story copper-toned glass structure on a hill overlooking Grand Traverse Bay.

A half-mile boulevard leading to the Tower glows with life-sized leaping deer, made of manzanita vines, intertwined with white lights. Their playground is one of the resort's two 18-hole golf courses.

Enormous garlands of lights, festooned between lamp posts along the route, are punctuated with glistening gold stars and geometric objects.

THE TOWER'S lobby also is a blaze of white lights. At certain hours of the day, visitors are greeted by carolers, assembled before a 15-foot Christmas tree, decorated by animated skating bears.

The tree soars into the lobby skylight, where a quartet of white flying Pegasus horses with eight-foot wing spans is suspended. Their red satin ribbon reins are controlled by a pair of snow geese in a white sleigh.

Twenty-two handmade animals — raccoons, skunks, deer and muskrats — play near a running creekbed and a fantasy forest.

A live Santa elf is perched atop stool before a cobblestone fireplace, complete with crackling logs. The elf reads Christmas tales to the smaller set, while their parents roam through the Gallery of Shops — 20 shops that sell everything from dried cherries to designer fashions.

The dinner theater features a buffet with a variety of salads, three different entrees (fish, beef or fowl), as well as vegetables and a groaning dessert table.

Sunday brunch in the Trillium Restaurant at the top of the Tower offers a spread ranging from German potato salad, beef stroganoff and eggs benedict to smoked fish, ham, shrimp salads, roast beef, more desserts, fresh fruit and a create-your-own omelet stall.

The 90-minute revue, "Celebrate Me Home," flashes from one large stage and six smaller platforms at a heady pace. Its 11 cast members are young professionals, who romp through everything from rock, country and "Jingle Bells" to the "Hallelujah Chorus."

SHOULD ANYONE question the reality of this fantasy, they might plunge into the sobering waters of one of the indoor pools, open from 6 a.m. to midnight. One is a 2,400-square-foot lap pool, enclosed by glass walls and a partial glass ceiling.

Dark falls early and last long in Michigan's north country. So it's not improbable that a skeptic could be swimming under the stars.

Northwoods Fantasy time is running out

If you're interested in a Christmas with a different twist, this weekend is the last weekend for the Northwoods Fantasy Holiday at Grand Traverse Resort Village.

Five types of accommodations are available — hotel (\$140 per person double occupancy), studio (\$135 per person double occupancy), lower (\$165 per person double occupancy),

one-bedroom condo (\$165 per person double occupancy) and two-bedroom condo (\$135 per person, four people to a room).

The package price for children is \$43 for those 4 to 12 years of age and \$75 for those 13 years and older.

For more information and reservations, call 1-800-678-1308.

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Gourmet Feast

Strudel of Spinach and Ricotta Cheese with Basil Chive Sauce, Holiday Tossed Salad, Strawberry Margarita Sorbet, Roast Tenderloin of Beef with Pheasant Mousse, Grilled Gulf Shrimp with Red Pepper Sauce, Banana Hazelnut Waffle, Champagne (one bottle per couple), Party Favors.

Dinner — 7-9 p.m. Cash Bar: Liquor, Beer, Wine and After-Dinner Cordials
Dancing — 9:30 p.m. — 1:30 a.m.

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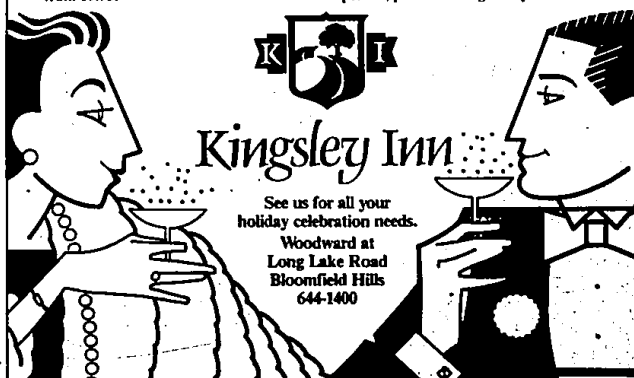
Enjoy dinner while you dance. A select limited menu will be served in the ballroom throughout the evening. Party favors, champagne toast and midnight snack bar included. Cash bar available. 35.00 per person. Pre-paid cover charge.

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