

Splash and play at Great Bear Lodge

BY MARY QUINLEY
CORRESPONDENT

Standing shoulder to shoulder in the midst of Ohio's only indoor water park, a gaggle of pint-sized youngsters, teenage guys and gals, and forty-something adults gazed upwards at a bucket, perched almost 60 feet above their heads.

Grownups grinned. Fidgety kids pretended to be brave. All eyes watched as the bucket filled with water.

Yet, when the 1,000-gallon bucket tipped forward, dousing the crowd, shrieks, giggles and laughter vibrated throughout the park.

Spaaa-LAASSSH!
Welcome to Fort Mackenzie, an interactive tree house/water fort at the Great Bear Lodge in Sandusky.

The fort, sporting suspension bridges, cargo nets and web crawls, features a fun play zone for guests like the DiCello family of Livonia.

"The whole climbing structure was one of my favorite parts," said Annette DiCello, 13, a student at St. Michael's

School in Livonia. Annette, her 11-year-old sister, Emma, and their mom, Mary, enjoyed a "girls only" weekend at the resort with friends.

Standing beneath the fort's bucket was like standing in a waterfall and having all the water come down at once, Annette said. "It was one big rush!"

Mary preferred to observe from a distance.

"Every time the bell would ring, the kids would go charging (to the fort)," she said. A bucket dumps every few minutes to let guests know that the bucket dumping is about to begin.

"The kids had a blast!" said Mary, who enjoyed relaxing in an inner tube on the lazy river ride and sitting in the adults-only whirlpool for a "few minutes of peace and quiet."

She was impressed with the cleanliness of the lodge and the pleasant staff.

In March 2001, the Great Bear Lodge opened its doors. No matter what surprises Mother Nature has in store, this four-seasons resort pro-



Great Bear Lodge is a Horthwoods-themed indoor water park resort with 271 luxury suites, 100-game arcade, two restaurants, and fitness center.

vides a comfy, family-friendly adventure in a north woods ambience.

"Guests never have to leave the property once they check-in," said Sarah Wysong, group sales manager. The reason, she said, is because the resort features three dining venues, two gift shops, a 100-game arcade, and daily craft programs for children.

Some guests, however, choose to venture out and check out the nearby attractions like Cedar Point, Kelley's Island and Put-in-Bay. The complex includes a five-story, water activity and fun center with a slew of wet and wild options geared for visitors of all ages.

There are two four-story, 300-foot tube slides that drop riders into a lazy river pool. Two body slides, three kiddie slides and an activity pool to shoot hoops provide hours of water fun.

Cub Paw Pool, equipped with a zero-depth entry, features tumbling buckets for the younger set. A fitness center and gift shops are also available.

Mary Quintley is a Livonia resident who writes about food and travel for the Observer & Eccentric Newspapers.

There's lots to do in Sandusky area

Here's a sampling of area attractions:
■ Situated less than five miles from the lodge, Cedar Point Amusement Park/Resort offers more rides than any other park on the planet. Call (419) 627-2350 or www.cedarpoint.com.
■ Sample wine and/or take a tour at Firelands Winery, Bardshar Road, Sandusky. For information call (800) 548-WINE or (419) 625-5474, or check www.firelandswinery.com.
■ Rent a bicycle or golf cart to explore the largest prehistoric glacial grooves in the world on Kelleys Island. Visit www.kelleysisland.com.
■ Check out the historic barn and sip wine at Sand Hill Vineyard & Winery, State Route 4. Call (419) 626-8500.
■ Take the ferry to Put-in-Bay to shop, tour a

cave, visit Perry's Monument and more. Check www.put-in-bay.com.
■ Ride an antique carousel at the Museum of Carousel Art & History, US Route 6 and Jackson St., Sandusky. Call (419) 626-6111 or go online: www.merrygroundmuseum.org.
■ The Sandusky State Theatre, a historic venue at 107 Columbus Ave. in Sandusky, presents Broadway musicals, top-name entertainment and stage productions. Call (877) 378-2150, (419) 626-1950 or visit www.state-theatre.com.
For more information on the region, call the Sandusky/Erie County Visitors & Convention Bureau at (800) 256-ERIE or check the web at: www.VisitOhio.com.

IF YOU GO

What: Great Bear Lodge
Where: 4600 Milan Road (State Route 250), just north of the Ohio Turnpike, Sandusky, Ohio
Accommodations: All rooms, which are smoke free, include wet bar, microwave and refrigerator. A loft (fireplace suite) (\$339) with additional bath, sleeps a maximum of 8 people and includes six water park passes. The family suite (maximum 6 people) costs \$249 and includes four passes. Other packages are available. Weekends, holidays and peak periods require a two-night minimum stay.
Dining: The lodge restaurants are casual. Menu items run the gamut from pizza, fajitas and burgers to fish, chicken, beef and pasta entrees. Beer, wine and liquor are available.
Information: (888) 779-2327, (419) 609-6000 or www.greatbearlodge.com.



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