



Knife River Heritage & Cultural Center

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By Paul von Goertz - KRHCC Board Member

FUTURE OF KNIFE RIVER MARINA IS ANYONE'S GUESS

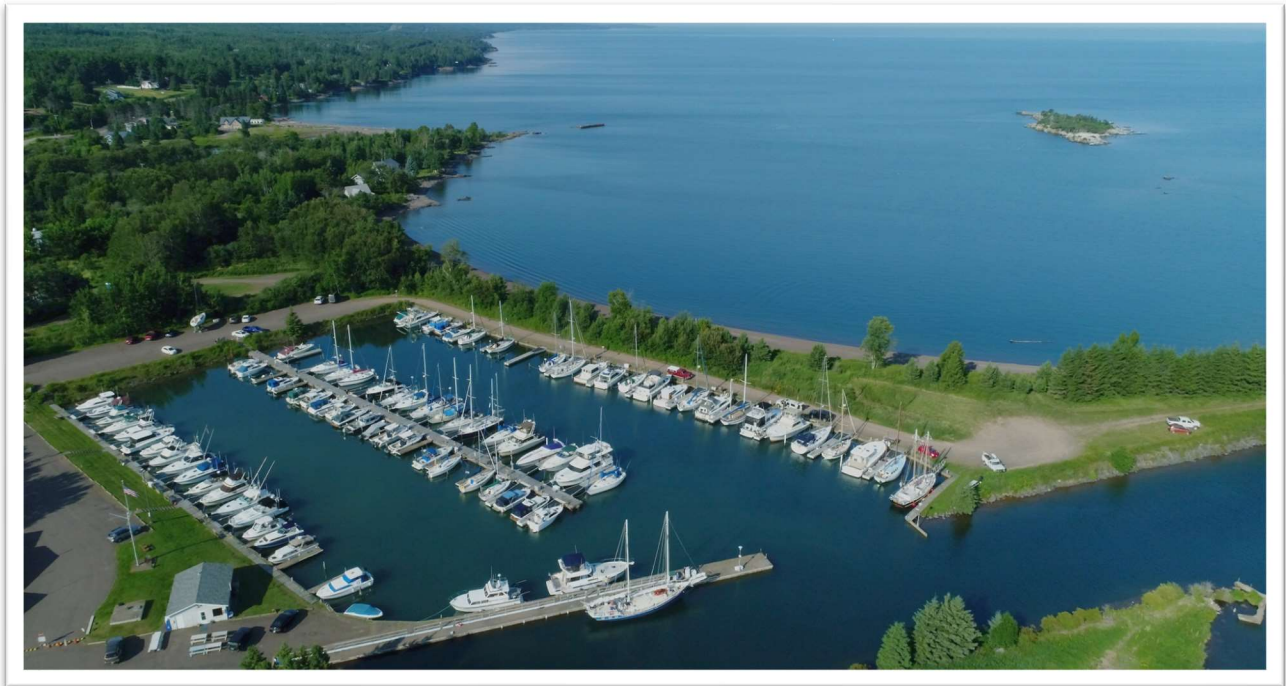


Photo credit: Fred Dudderar

The KR Marina is 50 years old this year, built with old marina technology, needs more than \$19 million to cover deferred maintenance projects and repairs, and at this time there is no plan going forward. The DNR, the marina owner for more than 20 years, is now weighing future costs while considering whether that money could benefit more people elsewhere.

The Knife River Marina is the only commercial marina the DNR fully owns and maintains in the state. The Silver Bay marina is owned by the DNR but is run and maintained by the city of Silver Bay.

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All above was my take-away from DNR speakers at a focus group called by them in Knife River (KR). The meeting was held at the rec building on Friday, September 22nd.

I was contacted by the DNR in August to help them set up a focus group to get a sense of marina issues from local people. The information gained would then be used as a discussion guideline for a larger meeting with townspeople and other interested parties later. I suggested a good section of KR people would be the boards of the KRRC and KRHCC.

I have some recollection of how the marina came into reality as I was the last president of the now defunct Knife River Harbor Association. I'm so sorry I accepted this position as I was a KR resident for less than two years and had little history on the association or local issues surrounding the marina which was under construction. But when you are 26 years old you think you know everything.

Some background:



What was to be the marina started in the late 1940s and early 1950s when local commercial fishermen formed a co-op to dredge a harbor at the marina site. Shares were \$100 each. The harbor was accomplished by 1953 with a lot of the work done by fishermen.

Photo left: Local fishermen review the site for the proposed harbor. From left to right is; Peter Bugge, unknown fisherman, Hans Pederson, and Joe Liberty.

Photo credit : KRHCC archives

Photo right: The footprint of harbor in November of 1948. Much of the excavating was done by the fishermen. Today's marina expanded on the fishermen's efforts.

Photo credit: Randy Ellestad Collection

By the mid to late 1950s lake trout had been decimated by the sea lamprey, yet the fishermen hoped that fishing out of Knife River could continue with the help of the DNR in controlling the parasite and introducing new fish species. In the later 1960s the fishermen, with the help of the county, applied for federal funds to build a marina. The application was made through the Economic Development Administration (EDA)



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with the argument that the marina would spin off related businesses and be a safe harbor for commercial and sport fishermen.

The EDA required the county to have a local share in the marina application. That share became the value of the existing harbor land which was owned by the fishermen under the Knife River Harbor Association.

What happened next has been a point of generational contention. A meeting was called by the head of the association at the time to vote the associations' stock to the county as "local share." A covenant in the vote stated that should the marina be built, association fishermen would be assured dock space and at a reduced rate or even no cost. Not all the fishermen were in favor of the stock transfer, but the vote passed. Those opposed to the transfer said stockholders were not given proper notice of the meeting, and meeting minutes and signed ballots could not be produced. Hard feelings exist even today on how the vote was handled.

It took several years for the EDA application to move through federal channels, but it eventually did. The marina opened with some fanfare in early June of 1973. I was MC as the most recent association president and remember that dignitaries included Rudy Perpich, who was either Lieutenant Governor or Governor. It also was raining and blowing NE.

All the above info is mostly from my memory and should have some credibility as Mary and I live a block from the marina, and we had a boat in the marina from day one until last year. So, I followed marina matters quite closely. I gave myself the honor of being the second boat into the harbor the day it opened. The first boat was that owned by Jack Arnold, the local EDA representative who stick-handled the whole application.

It is important people understand all this background so you can grasp the sticky-wicket that's about to unfold as the marina's future is discussed.

First, there's the legitimacy of the transfer of KR Harbor Association stock to the county to help make the EDA application. Then there is the covenant that fishermen get dock space at a reduced rate or free. What happened to that understanding?

Secondly, in the late 1980s, Fred Brewster, who was from the Chicago area and spent summers at the Encampment Island area, had a beautiful sailboat named GAVIA at the marina. He became close friends with Ed Drill, the contract marina manager at the time, and loved the quiet and serene nature of the marina. When he learned a private party had (I think) seven acres of land bordering the marina for sale, he bought it and gave it to the county with the stipulation that the land be left unsold and in its natural state. A big relief for all of us who love the wooded area that surrounds the marina.



In 1986 we in Knife River were told the county wanted to sell the land gifted by Brewster to a developer who was expected to build townhomes for tax base. What!!! What about the Brewster agreement?

Image Public domain

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For what happened next on this county end-run around, see the September 2022 issue of this newsletter "Don't mess with Knife River." The issue is on our website krhcc.org under "Recent News."

To thicken the plot, in the late 1990s (?) the county decided the marina was a money pit and sold it (gave it?) to the DNR. Now this is interesting, the marina was built with federal funds and now the state of MN owns it? What kind of return on investment is this?

So, this is where we are today with many fingers in the pie and let's not forget KR folks (reread that September, 2022 issue of this newsletter).

Two big questions need to be answered before considering the sale of the marina and surrounding acreage, presumably for town homes. One is water. We are all on wells. How many holes can be punched in the underlying bedrock before wells go dry, turn salty or muddy? Pull water from the lake? Can be done but very costly and permitting would be a nightmare.

Secondly, what is the capacity of our sewer system? Can it handle sewage and wastewater from another 20-30 (or more?) housing units?

As DNR officials weigh the future costs to make the marina viable, they are also considering whether that money could benefit more users elsewhere. Whatever the DNR decides, it intends to keep public access to the lake and a stretch of the agate beach. The DNR's intent is for the marina to continue operations, but under a different model. The DNR has issued a series of short-term contracts to Sailboats, Inc. to operate the marina, and a long-term lease to that company or another provider could be an alternative to a sale.

The channel is maintained by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and would remain in its hands.

The DNR plans to hold an open public meeting to discuss the future of the marina soon. Watch for more information.

Editor's note:

This newsletter is a flagrant violation of good journalism by mixing fact with opinion. Take what you like from it or go back through 50 years of county records and see if you find anything dramatically different.

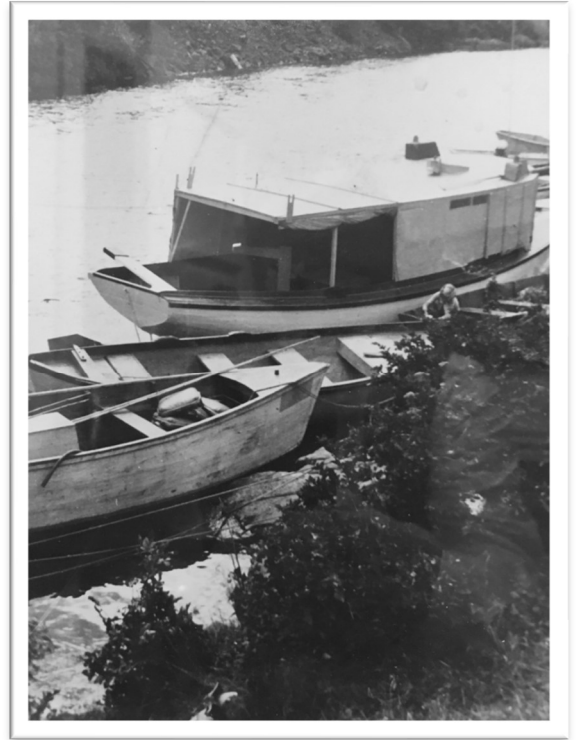
“KEEP IT SIMPLE.” KR’S FIRST MARINA.

I can’t help but wonder what KR’s original fishing families would think about spending more than \$19 million to rehab a marina. They had a very simple answer for a protected harbor and that was the river.

From the 1920s into the early 1950s the river was the answer for those who chose not to build a skid along the shoreline. They built a wood dock face along the riverbank where Emily’s Restaurant used to be. Neither lake or river option was particularly attractive as a lake storm could take out a skid and a heavy rain could clear the riverbank of dock and boat if not tied to a tree. Photo credit: Carol Carlson.

Boats were protected from violent nor’easters, but the river mouth would be rearranged. This required reopening the mouth with some sort of dredging apparatus.

The riverbank was viable though. The Kendall family would offer charters from the site from boats to 35’ and drafting up to three feet. People liked the short walk from the original Emily’s to the boat landing and ease of boarding. After a fishing charter, men could sit at Emily’s bar and swap lies about their fishing adventure.



The river served its purpose as a harbor of sorts, but as more and more boats came to fish the waters from Knife River, and boats became larger, it became apparent a deep-water harbor would have to be built.

Carl Erickson’s original CRUSADER, a boat of about 26 feet, moored in the river just above the railroad bridge.

Photo credit: Randy Ellestad Collection

KRHCC SAYS ‘THANK YOU’ TO DOUG HILL IN A SWEET WAY

On Saturday, October 14th the KRHCC hosted an Ice Cream Social to thank Doug Hill for his 1,000 or so volunteer hours spent helping to restore CRUSADER II.

The social was open to anyone who had the pleasure to meet this southern gentleman during his seven-month stay in KR. Doug’s favorite ice cream was served (mint chocolate chip) as well as ingredients for his favorite sundae (Tin Roof). About 50+ people attended the social to express their thanks to Doug for helping to restore a Knife River icon. Photo credit: Paul von Goertz

Doug, who lives in Florida, arrived May 3 and returned to his family the day following the social.

Doug was motivated, in part, to help with the restoration because his grandfather, Helmer Hill, and great uncle Reuben, built it in 1938. “I figured a Hill family member should be involved with the restoration,” said Doug, who is talented in just about all the building and automotive trades.



Every Monday Doug would meet with Larry Ronning, Project Manager, to go over the week’s work which would be accomplished by Doug with help from other volunteers.

A surprise at the social was a check presented to Doug by relatives of Carl Erickson, who owned CRUSADER II and fished it for many years. Brian Entzion represented the Erickson family (photo left) and presented the check with praise for not only the work to restore his grandfather’s boat, but for all the work done by the KRHCC to preserve Knife River’s history. “This is who we are,” said Brian.

Along with a check, the family gave Doug a Duluth Pack to remember his summer on the North Shore.

Photo credit: Paul von Goertz

Best news of the day came late in the social when Doug spoke about his summer in KR and the kindness and generosity of those he met adding he will be back next summer “to finish some odds and ends”, help install the engine, and help replicate the boat’s interior. (applause!).

A most special gift was an original name board off CRUSADER II presented by Randy Ellestad, KRHCC board member and Knife River historian. The name was chiseled into the board, perhaps by Doug’s grandfather, Helmer Hill.

Photo credit: Paul von Goertz



DOCUMENTARY WILL INCLUDE HILL FAMILY OF BOAT BUILDERS

The Lake Superior Marine Museum in Duluth, the Cook County Historical Society in Grand Marais and the North Shore Commercial Fishing Museum in Tofte, have joined to sponsor a documentary on the history of North Shore and Isle Royale commercial fishing. The film, “Lost but Not Forgotten,” focuses on families, boat builders and the challenges of making a living as a commercial fisherman on the North Shore.

NorthPoint Productions of Duluth is producing the documentary. NorthPoint owner, Fred Dudderar, heard about the restoration of CRUSADER II and wanted to shoot some video of the restoration in progress. There he met Doug Hill, working tediously on CRUSADER II. When Fred learned Doug was



a member of the Hill family of boat builders, and is actually working within the family trade, he was ecstatic. “It was like ‘Wow’, Fred said, “what were the odds I would stumble across a Hill family member who is helping to restore the boat his grandfather and great uncle built!”

The interview and videotape (photo left) with Doug was conducted on Wednesday, October 11 and took about an hour. Part One of the documentary, which includes Chapters 1, 2 and 3, premiered on October 14, 2023, in Grand Marais at the Arrowhead Center for the Arts. Photo credit: Paul von Goertz

Fred has assured us that the documentary will in the future be made available for viewing by the public in Knife River. Specifics will be announced in a forthcoming KRHCC newsletter.

TRIBAL HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER VISITS THE KRHCC

Evan Schroeder, Tribal Historic Preservation officer for the Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa, accepted an invitation from the KRHCC to visit the center to see the interpretive display that his office helped write.

The display is one of five that are part of our commercial fishing exhibit and is titled “The Indigenous Presence in Knife River” (see image right). Paul von Goertz, KRHCC Board Chair, said. “We felt it only right that the KRHCC collaborate with Indigenous people to write the display content. Indigenous people don’t have a written language, but rather passed their history on to future generations orally. So, by working directly with Indigenous people we feel we have the most accurate account of local Indigenous history.”

Evan described the display as, “Awesome” and commented: “This is what we like to do to help people understand our history.”

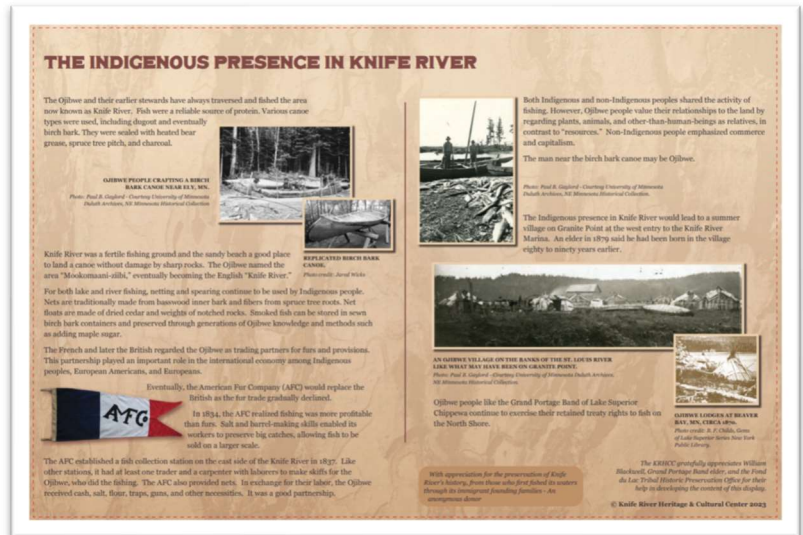


Photo credit: Doug Hill

The KRHCC expressed an interest in working with Evan on future activities where KRers can learn more about their Indigenous past, and Evan agreed.

Photo: Evan Schroeder, left, and Paul von Goertz, right, view the five interpretive displays mounted on the viewing deck into the interior of CRUSADER II.

“CHRISTMAS TREE TRAIN” WILL BE (IS) A SELL-OUT

As I write this on October 12, only 56 tickets remain out of 130 for the “Christmas Tree Train.” This kick-off event to the holiday season has sold out since the North Shore Scenic Railroad offered it two years ago. Families ride from Duluth to a tree lot at the KRHCC where they select a tree, have it wrapped and placed on a flatcar for the return to Duluth. For tickets and more information on the “Christmas Tree Train” go to the North Shore Scenic Railroad’s website.

The “Christmas Tree Train” takes place in conjunction with the KRHCC’s “Trees. Trains. Traditions” event held on November 25, the Saturday after Thanksgiving. More on the TTT event in the November newsletter.

Photo: Families riding the “Christmas Tree Train” select a tree from the KRHCC tree lot.
Photo credit: Paul von Goertz



CRUSADER II SURE LIKES PAINT

After decades of going without paint, the fish tug is making up for it by sucking up about 18 gallons so far as follows:



Number of gallons

- Hull 3 white
- Bottom 2 red
- Boat interior 8 white
- Deck 2 gray
- Undercoat 3 white

If you haven’t bought paint in a while, the cost is \$50 - \$70 a gallon. I will acknowledge though that paints today are longer lasting, easy to apply and easy to clean up. We laid down multiple coats because the woods of the boat were so dry. Jim Allert, lead painter in image left, said that the wood would suck the paint from his brush even before his brush touched the wood (Oh my...)

Other painters were Lee Cohen, Norbert Norman, Kris Olson and myself who swung a brush until my shoulder gave out.

Photo credit: Paul von Goertz

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We want to point out the generosity of our friends at Two Harbors Lumber who donated eight gallons of Valspar white latex paint for the boat's interior. Thank you Gangestads! All paint and related supplies for the boat's restoration were purchased in Two Harbors.

DONATIONS, HONORARIUMS AND SPONSORSHIPS

Donations:

- June Hall to general fund.
- Nancy Bothwell to general fund
- Two Harbors Lumber Co. – Donation of eight gallons of white latex paint to paint CRUSADER II's interior.
- Kerrick Sod Company – Donation of 2,600 sq. ft. of sod for perimeter of commercial fishing exhibit.

The KRHCC is a 501(c)(3) non-profit so all donations whether in the form of a memorial, honorarium, or sponsorship are fully tax deductible. Your comments and suggestions for this monthly emailed newsletter are always welcome. Email to: info@krhcc.org

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