



# N O R T H E R N Currents

THE LEADER'S COMMUNITY NEWS

## Ground is broken for a dream

### Groundbreaking for Faith's Lodge brings promise of a retreat for families and children

by Nancy Jappe

WEBSTER - Six years of careful thought and planning is finally becoming reality for Mark and Susan Lacek.



Construction of Faith's Lodge, a retreat on 80 acres of land north of Webster with a private lake and nature trails, will begin with excavation scheduled to take place within the next couple of weeks, framing in September and be watertight by the start of deer season. With the finishing to be done over the winter, the facility is to be ready for use by the summer of 2007.



A proud and beaming couple, Mark and Susan Lacek, talked about their reason for pursuing the idea of a retreat for families who have lost children. They lost their first daughter, Faith Ann; and in searching for ways to deal with their grief, came up with a way they could help others facing the same emotions. "Mark and I are very pleased to be here today. So many people showed up for this or have come together in the last year or so. We are proud to have people in the community support us," Susan said.

The groundbreaking for Faith's Lodge, a retreat facility dedicated in memory of their first child, Faith Ann, was held Friday, July 14. Despite the heat and humidity of the day, a sizeable crowd of people climbed the hill on which the building will sit (or rode up in a golf cart) to celebrate the achievement with

Photos by Nancy Jappe

the Laceks and their partner, The Ronald McDonald House Charities.

When Mark Lacek, the creator of The Lodge at Crooked Lake, Siren, and Susan were married six years ago at Mark's home on Johnson Lake north of

Webster, they asked wedding guests to contribute to the start of a foundation in lieu of gifts.

A year after the wedding, the Laceks' first child, a daughter, Faith Ann, was stillborn. Her grieving parents made a vow that Faith's time on earth would not be in vain, that they would do something good in her memory. Their chance came through the foundation's focus on parents who have gone through a similar loss or have a child with a serious medical problem.

After the death of their child, the Laceks wanted to go someplace quiet. They chose Canoe Bay in Chetek, spending nearly a week there sitting on their cabin deck, taking walks through the woods and talking quietly. "I could feel myself starting to heal in that setting, with the beautiful nature, peacefulness and solace. It did something for us and our hearts, and we asked ourselves, 'What if we could do this for others, recreate the whole experience for a family who has lost a child?'"

That opportunity came through a partnership between The Lacek Foundation and The Ronald McDonald House. The two have formed a joint advisory board, and Faith's Lodge will receive an initial three-year grant that will cover the costs for all the families and services that are provided within the property during that time.

Meg Katzman, upper midwest executive director for Ronald McDonald House, met Susan Lacek at the Minnesota State Capitol when Susan was there as a parent advocating that birth certificates be issued for stillborn children. The effort was successful, and she received a birth certificate for Faith Ann. And she met Katzman.

"It goes to show that, when an idea is right, it appears quickly and well. From April 2005 to April 2006, we signed the

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Using the symbol for the Ronald McDonald House, participants at the groundbreaking of Faith's Lodge released monarch butterflies into the air. The Lacek children, Emmy (Emilia) and Ally (Alexandra), shown on the right, along with Jim Roane's children (Michael, Mark, Jay and Elizabeth) on the left, joined in releasing monarch butterflies. Roane, who lost an 11-month-old son in 1998, is president of the Ronald McDonald House board of directors.



Susan Lacek (forefront) and her husband, Mark, holding daughter Emmy, listened to words from Meg Katzman of the Ronald McDonald House Charities and Harm Weber from the town of Oakland during the ground breaking

contract bringing the Ronald McDonald House into the woods," Katzman commented.

"She understood the vision for this more than anyone else," Mark Lacek said.

According to Lacek, Faith's Lodge has three objectives: 1) To help families who have lost a child. 2) To help families who are experiencing medical crises with children. 3) To make every effort to reach out to the local community by putting together a local advisory board to help figure out how Faith's Lodge can be of benefit to the outside area.

Getting the community involved is very important to Mark and Susan Lacek. They are hoping that people with a variety of skills will volunteer to help with the construction of the lodge as well as serving the families once the lodge is open. They would like to see local service organizations come in and serve dinners, bringing the food, preparing the dinners for the families, serving them and cleaning up afterward.

"We want this to be something the community will really rally behind, be proud of associating with and proud to have here in town," Susan commented. "We want to partner with people to keep the expense of construction

down," Mark added, telling ground-breaking attendees about one company who will donate beds for the 48 units in the facility.

The lodge will be located on 80 acres that the Laceks purchased from a family from Milwaukee after a three-year search. The property had been in that family's retreat for the past 20 years, and the family built the surrounding nature trails. There is also a private lake on the property. The area is perfect for stressed families who need the chance to relax in the beauty of nature and all that the northwoods area has to offer.

"There is nothing like this for families in this area," Katzman said. "We care about the people who live in (Ronald McDonald) houses, and also when they leave our doors. We help them stay as a community and receive help. We feel we have little angels in heaven who help us. Faith is looking down on us, saying 'Yahoo, glory halleluia, this is wonderful.'"

For more information, visit [www.faithsloodge.org](http://www.faithsloodge.org) on the Internet, or call the office in Minneapolis at 612-825-2073. Anyone with ideas for the lodge can contact Fred Shepherd at [fred@faithsloodge.org](mailto:fred@faithsloodge.org).



Joann Christenson, one of the founders of the Ronald MacDonal House in the Twin Cities, looked at a model of Faith's Lodge, a retreat facility for families who have lost children or have children who are in crisis medical situations. The model, which took 500 hours to construct, was built by design students at Bemidji State University for a recent fund-raising gala in the Twin Cities that brought in 900 people and donations of \$250,000. Christenson, who has a cabin on Devils Lake, attended the groundbreaking for the lodge Friday, July 14. Faith's Lodge is a partnership between the Ronald McDonald House and The Lacek Foundation. Bill Rust and Randy Newberg are the building architects. Fred Shepherd is the construction project manager.

Photos by Nancy Jappe

Meg Katzman, executive director for the Ronald McDonald House Charities in the Upper Midwest, described herself and Mark Lacek as being "fire, ready and aim" type of people who took hold of an idea and, with tempering from Susan Lacek, brought it to reality. "This started out in a 250-mile radius. I think it has national implications, with families waiting to be referred to Faith's Lodge. It is phenomenal gift to families," Katzman said.



Emmy Lacek, shown here in a golf cart with her dad, Mark, sipped on a bottle of water, a necessary ingredient to combat the heat during the ground-breaking of Faith's Lodge, a tribute to Emmy's sister, Faith Ann, who was still-born a year before Emmy arrived.



Ready to scoop out buckets of dirt during the groundbreaking of Faith's Lodge Friday, July 14, were (L to R): Meg Katzman, Upper Midwest executive director for The Ronald McDonald House Charities; Jim Roane, president of the Ronald McDonald House Board of Directors; Deb Diepholz, a member of the Ronald McDonald House Board of Directors; Mark and Susan Lacek from The Lacek Foundation and Harm Weber, supervisor from the town of Oakland. "The town of Oakland is proud to have this kind of project and the people who are involved in this project," Weber said. "With the Ronald McDonald House involved, it is a wonderful situation for the people in this community."