



BURNETT COUNTY SENTINEL

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Faith's Lodge gives hope

•“A place to catch your breath” for families in crisis.

By MARTIN LUNDEEN
Sentinel Reporter

WEBSTER—For Mark and Susan Lacek, Faith's Lodge, a retreat for families facing pediatric illness or who have experienced the loss of a child is a chance to turn a personal tragedy into a way to help others.

When their first daughter, Faith Ann was lost at birth less than a year after their marriage, the Laceks found that, in the words of Susan, “there weren't a lot of resources available” for those in their situation.

After seeing the film “Saving Private Ryan” prior to their marriage, the couple was inspired by the selflessness of their parents' generation. “You just don't see people giving to that level.” said Susan. “We had been fortunate, and just wanted to give back.”

Consequently, the couple began The Lacek Foundation, a 501(c)(3) non-profit corporation at the time of their wedding.

Now, in cooperation with Ronald McDonald House Charities, Upper Midwest (RMHC, UM), the Lacek Foundation will be working to build Faith's Lodge, a \$1.8 million facility on 80 acres of land north of Webster. “We don't want to create another cause,” said Susan, “but to help people.”

Scheduled to open in the summer of 2007, Faith's Lodge will house up to 48 guests in eight family suites, and the facility will include a memory garden, chapel, and walking trails which provide access to two lakes. Its setting in nature is an integral part of the design. “We know how stress-relieving it can be to be up here.” said Mark.

“RMHC, UM will design the guest experience from the moment someone steps through the door.” said Susan. “They will find families and take referrals.” Additionally, RMHC, UM will help to design programming and activities such as crafts, therapy, and entertainment.

“It revolves around a sense of community.” said Susan. “Each guest will receive an experience tailored to their situation. They can do as much or as little (in terms of structured activities) as they want. No one will be forced to do anything they don't want to do.”

Since beginning work on Faith's Lodge, Mark characterized the level of support they have received as “overwhelming.”

“Select Comfort has provided all of the beds, and Hopkins Sand and Gravel has helped with the road. Our intent is to meet with as many local companies as possible for help with goods and services.”

Students at Bemidji State have also contributed over 300 hours of their time to create a model of Faith's Lodge which will be shown

at the upcoming groundbreaking ceremony.

“If together everyone could donate a little bit, we can pass the savings on to those using the facilities.” A gala fundraiser held in early June netted over \$250,000 towards the building of Faith's Lodge.

“I truly believe that the overwhelming support shown at the gala is a testament to the fact that people feel there is a tremendous need for a place like Faith's Lodge.” said Susan.

“There are many families like ours who have or are going through the horrible experience of having lost a child, or who have a seriously ill child. We're hoping that Faith's Lodge can be one of the first steps on their path to healing.”

In order to make use of Faith's Lodge, a referral is mandatory. According to the lodge's website at www.faithslodge.org: “Guests will be referred by their medical caregivers, health care organization, therapist, clergy or other approved organizations such as Ronald McDonald

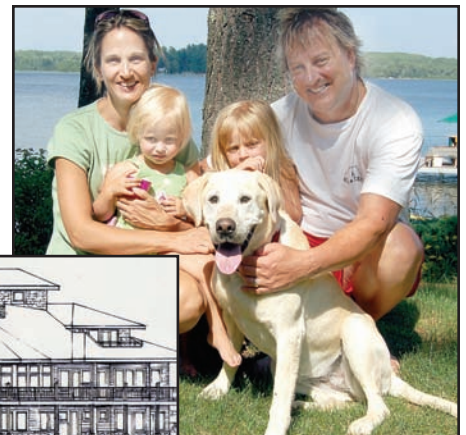
Houses and Make a Wish.”

Families will be able to stay at Faith's Lodge anywhere from one night to a week, and while partnerships with businesses help keep costs low, a scholarship program will be available to cover for those unable to pay.

“We want Faith's Lodge to be used, not just sit empty.” said Susan. “To our knowledge there is nothing like this for families. It is a unique niche to be filled, and if successful, we hope to expand the concept.”

“It's in memory of Faith.” said Mark. “We want to provide a place for couples who've lost a child to reconnect and be with people who've experienced something similar.”

“This is part of Faith's Legacy, a tribute to her and a way to make something beautiful come out of the worst thing that happened in our lives.”



Mark and Susan Lacek unwind by the lake along with daughters (left to right) Ally and Emmy, as well as their dog “Darby”. Staff photo by Martin Lundeen.