The story of Heritage Harbor

By Tom Heimsoth, Resort Founder

WELCOME TO OUR MASTER PLANNED MARINA RESORT COMMUNITY IN HISTORIC STARVED ROCK COUNTRY!

Heritage Harbor was born out of a passion for placemaking, my creative yearning, and my intrinsic love for relaxing around water and nature.

I've always been impacted by how much good it does for the soul of everyone to unwind and reenergize in the country with family and friends—and to build new relationships.

This is that hidden gem of a place that Midwesterners are yearning for. It is close-by, easy-to-access, beautiful, and restful!

HOW IT ALL BEGAN

Every summer, from the start of high school through college, I experienced the magic of living and working up at Lake Geneva--enjoying meaningful times in the great outdoors -- on or near the water. As I worked at camps with kids and families, I began to discover how family values grow, how life becomes more meaningful, and how love and caring become more evident as people relax in nature together. I have also since noticed that people always remember those special times away from regular life routines. Time away builds memories that last forever.

My wife, Pete, and I, together with our four kids, always had a difficult time finding a satisfying or easy way to travel out of Naperville to a place we could really enjoy in our scarce time off.

MAKING MEMORIES THAT STAY WITH YOU FOR A LIFETIME

Have you ever contemplated why it is that we always remember those times and those places more than we do others? What is it about those memories that are marked indelibly in our minds? Is it that we have an affinity to remember special experiences with family and loved ones, connecting with people and nature, enjoying special food?

A photo of all 9 of our Grandkids.

Opening the Dam to Create Heritage Harbor

FINDING A PLACE WHERE OUR SOULS COULD BE REPLENISHED WAS THE STORY OF MY LIFE

I graduated from college, taught school for a while, and then directed a camp and conference center full-time for a couple of years. Like many, I turned to the business world and worked for a large computer company for 10 years and then joined the pioneering world of software development as an entrepreneur. I ended up building a software technology company in Naperville that served the insurance and healthcare industry.

> *It was always difficult to get to Wisconsin or Western Michigan for those short getaways that were sorely needed.*

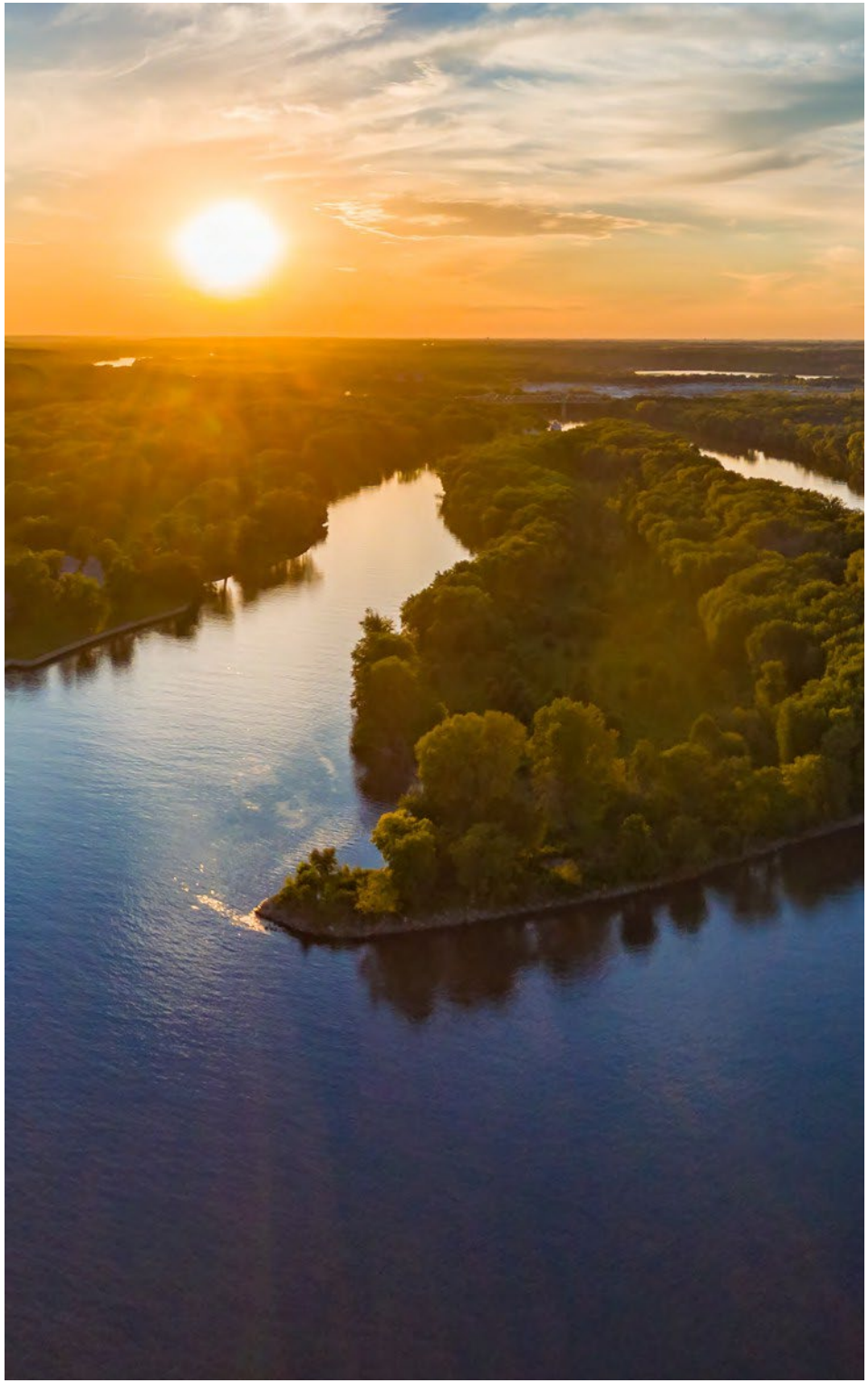
OUR FAMILY ALWAYS ENJOYED BOATING

All the lakes were getting more and more popular, and busy to the point of them becoming unpleasant if not dangerous. Even Lake Michigan just wasn't comfortable for the boating we wanted to enjoy. So, like most Chicago area residents, we followed the tradition of going north to Wisconsin, or around the south end of Lake Michigan to destinations in Western Michigan

SATISFYING THE INNER YEARNING TO CREATE PLACES OF LEISURE IN NATURE.

I began to pursue opportunities to create places that would satisfy my need for leisure and relaxation with my family and friends. I would satisfy my need for place-making by rehabbing homes and farms, doing part time real estate development, and creating home landscapes with my wife.

> *I was always about my wife, my kids, the outdoors, boats, farms, people, events, and family in general. The need to create a place that satisfied all these passions became resounding.*



WHAT CAN A RIVER DO TO THE SOUL?

So, we kept moving farther out—leaving Naperville, heading to Oswego (where we had acreage and completed more real estate redevelopment on the Fox River), and we realized even more what a river and nature did to our souls. As the kids grew up, Pete and I became ever more mindful of how limited our time with them was. It was then that we discovered a wonderful place to enjoy boating, small towns, friendly people, and good food—the Illinois River Valley!

> ***We could travel to the Illinois River Valley in around an hour, and it was sure easy to boat safely, and just relax for a whole weekend without the burden of a tedious trip before and after the stay.***

THE MYSTIQUE AND WONDER OF STARVED ROCK COUNTRY

We began to immerse ourselves in the wonder of Starved Rock Country. We fell in love with the place – its natural setting, ever-changing landscape, island beaches, the easy flow of the river and the plentiful wildlife. We were convinced that this was the place to be, and this was the unpretentious lifestyle we wanted – for the rest of our lives. We were won over by friendly people in a breathtaking, beautiful place…a rare and precious jewel right here in Illinois.

FROM SOFTWARE TO STARVED ROCK COUNTRY WE GO!

One thing led to another and, the next thing, Pete and I were on a quest to create a place along the Illinois River that would express the values, lifestyle, and memories that we had come to love. Our goal was to share what we had come to enjoy with other people wanting to find the same! It took a few attempts before we found the old Four-Star Marina and Campground…and no, four stars was not an appropriate rating for the place. It was a worn-out marina and campground that needed a complete overhaul before it would even come close to fulfilling the vision we had for a master-planned marina resort community.

> *I sold my software company to a public company, and I flunked retirement.*

THE SPACE IMMEDIATELY STOOD OUT AS BEING UNIQUE

The waterfront site was an ideal geographic location situated outside of the flood zone and showed great potential. The extra benefit was that it could easily be annexed into the City of Ottawa to take advantage of a great community with wonderful services.

> *Historically, the land upon which Four Star Marina was built was first a shale mine used in the production of bricks, then a barge repair facility, and then became the marina and campground known as Four Star.*

BUILDING A WALKABLE, QUAINT AND FRIENDLY PLACE

Now, to flashback to my early memories of visiting my grandparents in a walkable, quaint and friendly town--let me add that it is a widely accepted fact that these traditional, walkable, pre-automobile-centric towns of yesteryear are the inspiration for what we now call Traditional Neighborhood Design (TND or New Urbanism as it is also known). This movement is recognized more and more as the solution to effective land use and suburban sprawl. We live and learn.

EXCELLENT ENGINEERING AND TOWN PLANNING

Thanks to our outstanding engineers, excellent contractors, and an inspired vision of placemaking held by highly skilled kindred spirits who partnered with us on the project, we created this place called Heritage Harbor.

> *It is and always was my firm belief that we need to return to those urban planning ideals that worked so well before the automobile created suburban sprawl and we lost that honest-to-goodness neighborhood feel.*

SOME OF THE QUICK FACTS THAT I LIKE TO SHARE INCLUDE THAT WE:

- moved 1 million cubic yards of material
- created a 32-acre harbor, 150 acres of total land space, 2.5 miles of waterfront, and 1.6 miles of seawall with 10,000 huge harbor wall blocks – all uplands well out of the 100-year floodplain that is closely mapped and controlled by the federal government.

We successfully made Heritage Harbor one of the few places in the area where living, boating, and lifestyle are safely connected to the beautiful, natural and wild condition of a mighty river, in all its majesty.

> *In creating Heritage Harbor, we created a marina and a resort community that is unique to anywhere in the Midwest.*

WHY WE NAMED THIS PLACE HERITAGE HARBOR

The name Heritage Harbor came naturally to us because the development connects to the Illinois River, the major artery that allowed some of the earliest exploration of our country. This river became a federal commercial waterway with the building of the lock and dam system in 1933 by the U.S Army Corps of Engineers. The Waterway is located on the Illinois Heritage Corridor, which preserves and protects the very important history of the Illinois and Michigan Canal. The I & M Canal was the link that connected Lake Michigan to the Mississippi River and played a huge role in the development of Chicago as a commercial center in the mid-19th Century. The canal project was an incredible public works program that was literally hand dug by immigrants from Europe. Abraham Lincoln was very involved as a public official. This is our Heritage, and welcome to our Harbor.

> *Heritage Harbor enjoys the perfect amenities of both the Canal Corridor and the Illinois River by sitting between them and being a part of that historic setting.*

TODAY, WE CONTINUE THIS HERITAGE INTO THE FUTURE

We are avidly perpetuating the Heritage of this space by offering Midwesterners a place where they can enjoy the all-American concert of flowing water, exquisite landscape and wonderful and historic community.

WE HOPE YOUR STAY IS WONDERFUL, AND WE HOPE YOU WILL FALL IN LOVE AND STAY FOREVER. WE HAVE.

WELCOME!!!
Tom Heimsoth,

Resort Founder