

Island Bar offers top-notch waterfront fun

By Jack McLaughlin
Special to the Lakes Edition

I love Lake Koshkonong; I love the Rock River. As a reader of the Lakes Edition, there's a good chance you do too. There's also a good chance that the both of us don't love the Rock River or Lake Koshkonong nearly as much as Jim and Christa Bowers, owners of Fort Atkinson's Island Bar and Grill, the newly-renovated waterfront campground and eatery.

Boasting 25 sites complete with water and electric hook-ups, a full kitchen and lively outdoor entertainment, the spot will likely be a hub for years to come, and one that represents its community with experience and pride.

"We've lived on the water since 2003 — we've worked here, we've raised our family here," said Christa Bowers. She, alongside husband Jim and their young daughter, has owned a home on the shores of the Rock River in Edgerton for nearly 15 years. What's more, the couple, both raised in the area, have staked their livelihood on the city's watershed. Outside of their newest acquisition, the Bowers own and operate Newville Marine, a dock building and installation service working along these same bodies of

water. "We see Island Bar as an extension of our other business — it all fits together," said Jim Bowers. And this holistic approach is evident in the family's workings as well. Previously known as the Riverfront Resort, the establishment has been an entertaining hot spot on the north end of Lake Koshkonong for many years.

Its last owner, who ran the business for decades, installed the current campsites and worked to cultivate an inviting waterfront destination. The Bowers, who purchased the property late last fall, see themselves as maintaining a local institution. "It's been really cool, we're trying to bring this place back to life. It was a well-established restaurant that just needed a little TLC," Christa Bowers said. "We've been working to make the place our own."

This respect for local history and culture makes Island Bar not only fun, but community-focused in a way that truly matters. In fact, the business' name is a reference to nearby Blackhawk Island and an acknowledgement of the area's rich local history.

Much of this restoration work comes as a welcome sight for the Jefferson County business as well. Alongside several indoor embellish-

ments (including a beautifully rendered, wall-sized aerial photo of the location from the 1950s), Island Bar is in the process of installing a set of floating piers and dock space that will allow boaters a place to stop and relax after a day on the water.

Those with experience in the area know that the mouth of the Rock River, especially where it meets Lake Koshkonong (a mere quarter-mile upriver from the eatery) is notoriously shallow. The Bowers want their patrons to know that, in front of Island Bar and Grill, this should be a non-issue. Not only is the river in front of the restaurant a comfortable eight feet deep, but the Rock Koshkonong Lake District has recently installed a series of colored buoys to mark areas along the river with potential depth issues.

And speaking of boating, one of the bar's new additions comes in the form of a pontoon base set on shore in the establishment's outdoor area, directly adjacent to the custom fire pit guests can enjoy while taking in a cold beverage. While this might seem at first to be just part of a defunct watercraft, it's far more exciting, as this pontoon will be used as a themed stage for the live music slated to perform through-



Jim and Christa Bowers at Island Bar and Grill. (Photo submitted by Jack McLaughlin)

out the summer.

In addition to this fun piece of nautical décor, the bar is putting the finishing touches on an outdoor Tiki bar, which will imbue the establishment with a fun, tropical touch. Set to open on Friday, May 26, Jim and Christa Bowers have worked to schedule an opening celebration for their Tiki bar, securing sponsorships from both Cruzan Rum and Kona Beer, the latter of which is a well-known Hawaiian brewery featuring the refreshing Big Wave Golden Ale and the crisp Castaway IPA.

Diving deeper into their tropical romp, the

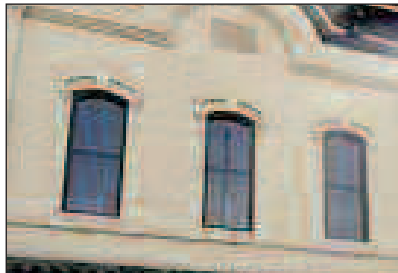
bar will offer a lively array of themed drinks, such as the Muskie-Mosa. "We plan on serving everyone from fish pails too — it's going to be a lot of fun," stated Christa Bowers.

Aside from a litany of clever, fishy drink specials, serious sportsman should also enjoy the top-notch angling offered throughout the northern stretch of the Rock River. "In the spring I would see 40 to 50 boats fishing in the area," said Christa Bowers, who, alongside husband Jim, noted wall-eye fishing in the area is particularly hot. While the docks will prevent patrons from throwing a line

in from Island Bar's property, a public park located mere feet downriver, in easy walking distance, is a prime location for fishermen.

Prime rib burgers, alongside made-to-order guacamole, round out the new establishment's mouth-watering dinner options and solidify the location as a go-to spot for one and all. A mere five-mile drive from Fort Atkinson, Island Bar and Grill boasts the secluded, natural beauty that can make locals feel like tourists, and the warm, inviting atmosphere that will make tourists feel like locals.

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