

'Until they chip my frozen carcass out of the snowbank'—Lac Courte Oreilles people love their winters

By Kathy Hanson
Contributing Writer

People who live here year-round or decide to remain on Lac Courte Oreilles for the winter, do so by clear choice. They love the seasons—all of them—some even favoring the winter months and quick to list the reasons why.

Jim Coors and Ann Pollock

This couple met in the winter of 1973 in northern California, a chance encounter that found them talking to each other about their Bonna wooden XC skis, which then led to their first skiing adventure together in Yosemite National Park.

"We've been together ever since (and) we still have the same skis, plus a bunch of others," said Jim.

In 1983, the first year their cabin on the eastern shore of Lac Courte Oreilles was winterized (Ann's great grandfather purchased the land around 1914), Jim and Ann skied their first Birkebeiner. They both vowed their first Birkie would also be their last—it was just "way too hard," said Jim.

28 Birkie races later, these two love the winters on Lac Courte Oreilles so much they make this their home in the winter and Madison their home in the summer. It's a paradigm shift that many wouldn't understand; for them, it's a beloved lifestyle.

Jim and Ann have their own 5km trail which they ski regularly and they routinely take day trips to the Seeley and Cable trails, as well as the Blue Hills, Nordic Woods, the Mukwonago Trail in the Chequamegon National Forest and Timberland Hills near Cumberland.

Outside of an occasional February freeze-up of the septic system, they have no complaints, claiming, "As long as there is snow, we would not want to be anywhere else other than our place at the lake."

Tom Burgess

An avowed sailor and regatta competitor on Lac Courte Oreilles, Tom Burgess is as comfortable living here in winter as he is in summer.

He and his late wife Sue built their home in 1990 on Ashland Point, on the north side of LCO's middle bay.

"It is my home and only home by choice. Every season in this northern locale has its attractions: moderately warm, sunny summer days, gorgeous fall colors, a winter wonderland of white accented by rich pine green and clean spring air with fragrant floral budding. I still enjoy travel, within the USA as well as internationally, but only for limited sojourns," Tom said.

A professionally trained writer, photographer and field editor, Tom is quick to see the beauty and the gift of winter on Lac Courte Oreilles where he spent summers, beginning as a toddler wearing diapers. Today seven daughters and their families all visit him throughout the year.

Like so many winter enthusiasts, Tom takes to the trails on his cross country skis.

"My special love is cross country skiing, which could mean a short hour across the frozen bay or a longer workout along the spectacular Birkie trail. Once you've warmed yourself working an uphill, you become a willing partner with nature and all its beauty. Everybody should try to experience this feeling. You literally carry this 'high' for the rest of your day," Tom said.

There's something else about Tom Burgess that keeps him loyal to the season: his community service and volunteerism.

He's been a member of the Hayward Rotary Club since he moved here; is active in the liturgy of St. Joseph's Catholic Church; has served as COLA president and co-authored his book, "Tales of Lac Courte Oreilles;" volunteers in the physical therapy department of the Hayward hospital; calls Bingo at the Senior Center; and volunteers for the Birkie and Musky Fest where he taps beer for the crowds on Main Street.

"There's little time to spend a winter's day staring out the window," Tom said.

Kevin and Sue Horrocks

Note: Sue provided this story and told it so well that we are sharing it verbatim in this newsletter. Enjoy—and pass the tequila!

"We've all been there. It's an overcast day in March. The ground is covered with grubby, slick ice and the path to the getaway car is treacherous for any footwear other than tree climbing spikes. 'Bleak,' is a kind word for it, and no signs of spring arriving any time soon.

Sitting inside is not the answer either. You and your mate have tired of indoor projects and you're pretty sick of seeing each other in the same ratty flannel shirt and Packers sweatpants. Because, yeah, you're dressed like twins, and the last time you saw your reflection was in the glass of a freezer compartment door at Marketplace. Not pretty.

You're hoping it's nothing more serious than a classic case of cabin fever, and you figure you can't be alone. The question is what to do about the malaise and your IQ dropping by the minute?

Well, on that day in March we had a rare bolt of inspiration. 'I know,' says she. 'Let's heat up the hot tub and invite the gang over for a tequila tasting. We've got all that tequila we brought back from Baja. We'll have it right now, in the middle of the day, and we'll make everybody go home after two hours, so that we don't have to feed anybody. We can all be on our respective couches by 5 p.m. What do you think?' He, never one to turn down a chance to see friends or experience the healing powers of agave, says, 'Sure, I'll get on the horn and call evrybody.'

The gang came and the gang soaked. The gang sipped and judged, and then sipped and stopped judging. Some with small children left. But the three, hardcore tequila aficionados remained submerged, both physically and mentally, until 6 p.m. The party ended when 'She,' who had gone inside three hours earlier, found them waxing metaphysically and looking seriously wrinkled, like aging Shar-Pei's. It was time to escort the guests home and call it a day.

Is a tasting party in a hot tub a good idea? You bet; our spirits rose, if only temporarily. Would we do it, again? Absolutely, but not without some essential stipulations:

- 1) Make it a legitimate wine tasting. Good wine in small amounts. Or, a craft beer tasting would be good, too. Just NO hard liquor. Tequila is a particularly bad idea.
- 2) Serve food. Crackers and cheese at the very least.
- 3) End the party at the agreed time. No exceptions.
- 4) Designated drivers are always a given. They're the only ones with sense enough to reject the idea of another tasting the next time somebody gets the winter hebbie jeebies."

Mitchell and Debra Swaden

Located on the isthmus between Big and Little Lac Courte Oreilles, the Swaden home was built over 20 years ago. Mitchell and Debra knew they would retire here and that dream came true in the fall of 2014 when they retired from dual attorney careers in the Twin Cities.

They leave no stone unturned and no snowball unmade in the winter when they "hike, ski and snowshoe the myriad of trails, unfettered by gnats, mosquitos and ticks."

Mitchell rides his fat tire bike, they spot the eagles daily and watch the colorful birds at their feeders (they especially enjoy the pileated woodpeckers), celebrate Hanukkah with friends, and play games and eat "latkes," (potato pancakes). Indoors, they read, enjoy the wood stove, knit, woodwork and gather with friends for a potluck.

"We love to be in the woods in winter. It's the place to appreciate the details of branches outlined in snow and frost, the quiet of the blanketed landscape and the joy of finding ourselves in the midst of a winter wonderland."

Chuck and Tracey Gundersen

Up on the hill on Barbertown Bay on the northeastern-most point of the lake, just south of where Little Bit 'O Sweden Resort once was, sits the Gundersen home with spectacular views and sunsets they track with the seasons.

Tracey and Chuck saw their two daughters off and decided they didn't need the four-bedroom, two-story house in the suburbs.

Today Tracey sells real estate for Re/Max Preferred Realty and Chuck is a builder/remodeler with a special appreciation for cabin restoration.

Chuck says poetic when he talks about winter.

"I look forward to winter every year. Some think of it as a sort of throwaway time of year where there is nothing to do and the weather is horrible. I beg to differ! The Norwegians say, 'There is no such thing as bad weather, just bad clothing,' and that is the truth. I look forward to watching the forest go to sleep under a pristine blanket of white. I enjoy the fact that, because there are no leaves on the undergrowth, you can see deep into the woods. You can see the houses, lakes and land formations that you would never know exist in the summer time. I enjoy snowmobiling, as we can quickly get from lake to lake, and from town to town without having to drive the endless, winding roads. It is an entirely different way to see the area, from here south to Birchwood, and north to Hurley, Bayfield, and all of the twists and turns and hills and lakes of the northern counties. I love that there are no crowds in the winter, and that you can go out for your favorite fish fry and actually talk with the owners, the waitresses and bartenders, and your friends who also brave the winter up here, whether they are weekenders or permanent residents.

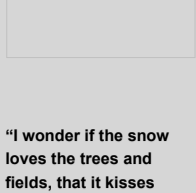
"I love snowshoeing. It is a completely different experience from snowmobiling, in which you are intimately tied to the land, and you move slowly through the frozen landscape. You discover that there are animals that still forage for food all winter. The smells and sounds are entirely different. The lake makes whale sounds as the ice freezes ever harder and expands to its shores, then tries to push those borders out even further until it cracks under the strain. The marshes never really freeze, as the decomposing weeds generate heat under the insulating layer of snow, and if you are not careful, you can put your foot, snowshoe and all, right through the thin layer of ice and get a nice mud bath up to your knee on a minus-20 degree day. Most of all, I enjoy cross-country skiing. I ski several days a week all winter, and have skied the Birkie now eight times. I plan on continuing to do it every year until they chip my frozen carcass out of the snowbank. I am no speedster, so it takes me all day to do it, but it fills my winter with activity, and comes to a beautiful crescendo with the weeklong activities and spectacle of the Birkie. When it is over, it is just a short time before winter itself is done, and it is time to get out the mountain bike! Right in a little ice skating (sometimes if the weather is just right, you can actually skate on the frozen lakes), ice fishing, sledding, snowmen, and just sitting and listening to the snowfall on a cold and otherwise silent night make winter the most mystical and magical season of the year."

In 2012 a Norwegian man named Tore Martin Sobak Gundersen won the Birkie. Chuck later learned that man was his cousin from Norway, the great grandson of his grandfather's brother. A cross-country ski race in Hayward, Wisconsin begun in 1973 with 34 skiers is now an international event with nearly 10,000 racers. And two cousins met for the first time.

Kathy Hanson is a free-lance reporter for the Sawyer County Gazette, the Sawyer County Field Editor for Our Wisconsin magazine, and Copy Editor for the Bayfield County Journal. She has also served as Staff Reporter, Business Feature Writer, Columnist, and Copy Editor for the Sawyer County Record.

If you haven't already done so, please [renew](#) your COLA membership for 2015. Thanks for your support!

Learn more about COLA on Facebook or the COLA website:



"I wonder if the snow loves the trees and fields, that it kisses them so gently? And then it covers them up snug, you know, with a white quilt; and perhaps it says "Go to sleep, darlings, till the summer comes again."

— Lewis Carroll, Alice's Adventures in Wonderland & Through the Looking-Glass

COLA COMMUNICATIONS

COLA Issues [Press Release](#): Lake Association Foots \$200,000 Bill for WDNR study

2016 WDNR Impaired Waters List [Updates Fact Sheet](#)

WDNR's [Draft 2016 Impaired Waters List](#)

COLA's [Response](#) to WDNR's 2016 Impaired Waters List

COLA issues [Press Release](#) on Shoreland Restoration Grant

COLA Issues [Press Release](#) on Saving Lac Courte Oreilles Monster Musky and Walleye Fishing.

COLA [Comments](#) on the Northwoods Beach Public Reserve Strip Draft Ordinance.

From [The Guardian](#): A cranberry politics primer focusing on Lac Courte Oreilles and written by a Washington, DC based tribal rights attorney.

COLA releases its Total Maximum Daily Load Report

[more information](#)

COLA finalizes its strategy to address the future health of our lakes

[more information](#)

Help COLA spread the good news - Like us on [Facebook](#) & share COLA's posts

NOTICES

It's the year-end campaign! Support COLA by contributing to the [Lac Courte Oreilles Foundation](#)

Are your neighbors and extended family members of COLA? If not, please ask them to [join](#).

Why "Short Ears, ...?"

Lac Courte Oreilles, or Lake Short Ears, was the name used by the first French traders who visited what was then known as Ottawa Lake.

There are at least two explanations for the name "Lac Courte Oreilles." One traces to the practice of a local band of Ottawas who trimmed their ears.

Another stems from the many small (ear-shaped?) bays located on big Lac Courte Oreilles. For additional information, see the references that follow.

Tales of Lac Courte Oreilles

This book, edited by Tom and Sue Burgess, together with COLA's history committee, provides a detailed history of Lac Courte

Oreilles. The book is available through COLA and the [Sherman & Ruth Weiss Community Library](#) in Hayward.

Spirit of the Ojibwa Images of Lac Courte Oreilles Elders

A well-referenced compilation of paintings, stories, photographs, and history published in 2012 by Sara Balbin, James R. Bailey, and Thelma Nayquonabe. It is available from the [Lac Courte Oreilles Ojibwa Community Library](#).

History Comes Alive

This 2004 publication, compiled and written by Caryl A. Pfaff and Ann Marie Penskov, is a compilation of community and history center photographs available from the [Lac Courte Oreilles Ojibwa Community Library](#).

[Archived Issues of Short Ears, Long Tales](#)

Merry Christmas & Happy Holidays

It's the End of the Year Campaign!

Support COLA by contributing to the [Lac Courte Oreilles Foundation](#)

COLA Mission: 1) to protect, preserve and enhance the quality of Lac Courte Oreilles and Little Lac Courte Oreilles, their shorelands and surrounding areas, while respecting the interests of property owners and the rights of the general public; and 2) to consider, study, survey and respond to issues deemed relevant by COLA's membership.

The eNewsletter Editor can be reached at:

COLA
P.O. Box 702
Hayward, WI 54843
courte.oreilles.lakes.association@gmail.com