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Posted September 12, 2006

## Camp Forest marks 100 years as ecumenical site

**By Cheryl Sherry**  
*Post-Crescent staff writer*

One of the fondest memories some might have of Camp Forest in Forest Junction is Lester Keller, now 77, dishing up ice cream at the snack shop.

The Forest Junction man said his fondest memory, however, is finding the Lord at the religious meetings held on campgrounds, still recognizable by their white clapboard cottages and 70-by-100-foot tabernacle.

It barely looks its age of 100, a birthday celebrated in July.

You can get a taste of a bygone era when Camp Forest holds its sixth annual Art Craft & Bake Sale fundraiser from noon to 8 p.m. Friday and 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Saturday on the campgrounds at the corner of State 57 and U.S. 10 under the water tower in Forest Junction.

"You can just feel the aura," said Lewis Rusch, 76, of the camp the Brillion man attended years ago. "In those days it was sort of a spiritual high kind of thing. There were no Christian radio stations or TV stations, there were no Christian bookstores and there weren't any mega churches for that matter.

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Camp Forest will hold its sixth annual Art Craft & Bake Sale fundraiser from noon to 8 p.m. Friday and 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Saturday on campgrounds at the corner of State 57 and U.S.

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So this place used to be packed."

"It was tradition," Keller said of the 10-day ecumenical camp meetings he first attended as a child. Camp was held on the grounds from 1906 through the late 1990s, when three- to four-day mini-camps were held, although attendance dramatically dropped. "Church closed down years back in the area, and they all gathered here for their services."

Henry Ott donated the land to the Methodist church, and in 1906, the Forest Junction Circuit Camp Meeting Association began raising funds toward the purchase of tents and gasoline-powered torches.

The first cottage was built in 1909 followed by a dining hall and administrative building in later years. The \$4,000 tabernacle was dedicated in 1924.

"I remember we had the tent behind the north side of the worship center," said 76-year-old Walter Keller of Forest Junction. "We didn't stay overnight until I bought a cottage. I had six girls and a boy. So we had a full house and everybody had a friend."

"What's amazing about this place — all of this was built for 10 days out of the year," Camp Forest president Judy Keller of Brillion said. "It's such a gorgeous place, and every time I come here I know there's a purpose to be here."

Today, the nondenominational church camp is owned by an independent nonprofit group that rents out the facilities to youth, adults, families and groups to offer enriching activities, social events or peaceful retreats.

Vacation Bible school also is held each summer at Camp Forest for children from four churches in Forest Junction and Brillion areas.

"We are also looking at different venues," said Judy, adding that the labor force from the Outagamie County Correctional Institute is helping renovate the buildings, refinish pews and paint the facility.

Although Camp Forest attracted hundreds of people in the early to mid-1900s, the board of directors is searching for ways to reinvent the camp and get the word out that it's available for the public to rent.

And, as a bonus, "you can feel God moving here," Judy added.

*Cheryl Sherry can be reached at 920-993-1000, ext. 249, or at [csherry@postcrescent.com](mailto:csherry@postcrescent.com).*

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10 under the water tower in Forest Junction.

Stroll through the wooded grounds of yesteryear and experience hand-painted items, florals, yard art, benches, carvings, homemade bakery and more. A fish fry is also planned from 4 to 8 p.m. Friday. For more information on renting Camp Forest, click on [www.forestjunction.org/camp.html](http://www.forestjunction.org/camp.html), call 920-989-1950 or e-mail [info@forestjunction.org](mailto:info@forestjunction.org).