

Singing 'round the campfire

BY RICK FOSTER
SUN CHRONICLE STAFF

Kristine Daniels is operations manager for Normandy Farms family campground in Foxboro, which recently celebrated its 35th anniversary, and a member of the family that has owned the West Street farmstead since 1759. She also grew up in the family business and is a keen observer of trends in camping, RV-ing and summertime recreation.

As summer and the camping season draws to a close, The Sun Chronicle caught up with Daniels.

Sun Chronicle: Kristine, how were you

THIS IS THE LATEST installation of "Mondays with Merolla," a weekly interview with local newsmakers and people of note. Today, Rick Foster, filling in for the vacationing James Merolla, interviews Normandy Farms operations manager Kristine Daniels.

first introduced to camping and the campground business?

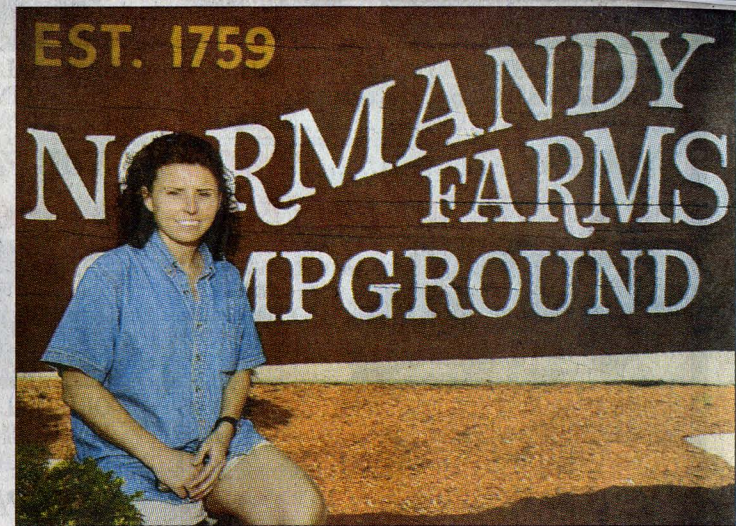
Kristine Daniels: I remember growing up here and having all of my friends who'd come to visit (the campground). I'd have my July friends, my August friends, it was just my way of life. By the time I was 8, I started working popcorn for several years until I started working in the pool

area and the recreation lodge.

SC: What is it that attracts families to camping as distinct from other forms of recreation?

KD: It varies, depending on the campground and what that campground offers. I think in our case, we offer more of a resort. There are four pools, two jacuzzis, a fitness room. You pretty much are at a resort when you come here. I think that's really the appeal. That you can go so close by, and we have families from Mansfield and North Attleboro, and have this at your fingertips. Gas is so expensive now, it really makes it attractive to do that.

SEE **DANIELS**, PAGE A5 ►



TOM MAGUIRE / THE SUN CHRONICLE

Kristine Daniels is operations manager for Normandy Farms family campground in Foxboro.

WEATHER

TODAY: Nice with some sunshine; high 80

TONIGHT: Clear; low 56

TUESDAY: Sun; high 84

Details, Page A12



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COMING UP

TUESDAY: Find a new part-time job or get going on planning for that new career. We offer tips in our special pull-out section "Jobs and Careers."

THIS WEEK in Get Out!: Bob Dylan — folkie, rocker, songwriter, poet, revolutionary, genius, icon — whatever you call him, he's coming to Pawtucket.

Vol. 37, No. 173



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► DANIELS: A lifetime of family camping

FROM PAGE A1

SC: How has the idea of camping changed over the past 20 years?

KD: It's not quite as simple. I think people have more expectations. We recently started offering cable connection on our sites. Now you have a need for level sites, for cement pads, you have landscaped sites.

Years ago, you just wanted the dirt site and the campfire ring and you'd be good to go. Another big change that we've seen has been with motor homes and RVs going from the simple pop-up (camping trailer) to now the big class A motor homes with slide outs (extra rooms that extend out from the trailer or RV). You have to have sites that can accommodate them.

SC: What's the origin of Normandy Farms campground?

KD: The family has been here since 1759. The property evolved into several farms, including a poultry farm and a dairy farm. It turned into a

snowmobile park where we rented 25 to 30 snowmobiles. It evolved very naturally because my parents were interested in snowmobiles and their friends would come over. The campground evolved naturally, too, because their friends would say, 'Can I put my pop-up over there?'" Then they realized there could really be a market for this. The campground started in 1971.

SC: Has the high cost of fuel and energy had an impact on camping?

KD: I don't think there has been an impact on camping per se. It has impacted us. Our energy bill has gone up over 35 percent. Gas prices have actually helped us. Our occupancy this year has gone up 2 to 3 percentage points. It's remarkable. But because here in

Foxboro we're in a concentrated area, people just stay local. It's cheaper for them to drive.

SC: Ten years from now, what do you think camping will be like?

KD: I think you have generational differences. My generation, for instance, has a different take on camping. I think that what we appreciate is the experience of camping, taking away something a little more unique. One of the things we're in the process of doing is installing canvas yurts (a hut modeled on those used by primitive peoples) on a cantilevered perch right around our pond area. It's very scenic. I think that's really going to attract people of my generation. It's taking a step back and trying to appreciate what camping is all about.