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CAMPING ADVENTURES

by Michael J. DeCicco

Campers have a place to go in South Coast whether they want a basic campground site for their tent or recreational vehicle or all the amenities of a campground park that includes a recreation hall and activities center.

Highest on the amenities list is Normandy Farms, 72 West Street, in Foxboro. Its 400 campsites sit on 100 acres that started as the Daniels family farm in 1759. It became a campground 'resort', still operated by the Daniels family, in 1971.

Camp sites at Normandy Farms range from basic ones with no utility connections for tents to sites with full water, sewer and 50-amp electrical hookups. Free Wi-Fi is available throughout the park, and a 20,000 square-foot lodge contains multiple levels of space. The lodge's amenities include an indoor heated pool, a sauna, a hot tub, function rooms, and activity "lofts" for both children and adults. Deluxe cabins are available for rent.

Marcia Galvin, oldest daughter of co-owner Al Daniels, said she likes the family business for multiple reasons.

"It's a welcoming business. We're part of the hospitality business," Galvin said. "When customers come here, they have smiles on their faces. I also like that we are preserving land. And I like that we are making family memories. Parents coming

here now first came here as children."

Galvin said the only thing a newcomer to camping needs to know is how to hook up their trailer. "The camping experience is pretty universal and simple," she said. "Most parks like ours have the same facilities."

She praised her staff as a secret to the park's success.

"Our staff people are the ones that keep our customers coming back here," said Galvin. "They make sure ours is the cleanest camp around. They are all dedicated to providing our customers a 'wow' experience."

OUTDOOR ADVENTURES

In contrast to Normandy, Forge Pond Campgrounds, 62 Forge Road in Assonet, is the area's smallest campground park.

The owners, however, like it that way. Diane Robert, whose husband's family has owned the park since the mid-1960s, said Forge Pond prides itself on being a "small site campground".

"It is just a place to get away from it all," Robert

said. "It has a small pond. We have a lot of seasonal campers. Our park is serene, tranquil and quiet."

Its 60 campsites on 25 acres of land are available for either a tent or a recreational vehicle. Its amenities include the usual water and 15-amp electric service hookups, but also fire pits and picnic tables, indoor restrooms with metered hot showers, a pavilion for social gatherings, a fishing pond, and horse shoe pits.

BACK TO BASICS

Westport Campgrounds, a 40-year-old family-run operation in Westport, is a little bigger but has a similar philosophy of wanting to stay small. Its 33 acres offer 100 camp sites, 60 for trailers, 40 for tents.

Martin Costa, manager/owner and son of founder George Costa, said the park's only goal is to offer campers the basics.

"I want to offer a back-to-nature campground. We get tourists, bike clubs, and 30K run people," said Costa. "People on their way to festivals or who just

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want to enjoy the area. That's the kind of people I'm attracting. Works well for me. It doesn't bring on the headaches of a big operation."

Costa added that Westport Campgrounds is geared toward adults.

"We have no swimming pool or natural body of water," he said. "We used to be a destination campground. We are now a home-base campground. A safe, clean, quiet, place for campers to stay while they take their vacation time to Martha's Vineyard and Horseneck Beach. I wanted to run something simple and bring back simplicity. People just want a quiet place to stay."

Westport Campgrounds is densely wooded, he said, with campsites large enough to fit a tent or trailer and two cars. Free Wi-Fi and the usual water and electrical systems and special hookups for trailers are included. So are enclosed bathrooms with showers and sinks, another building housing two washers and dryers and a store that sells camping equipment. The recreation hall offers pool and ping-pong tables and a lending library for books and DVDs.

FAMILY FRIENDLY

The bigger campground parks in the area include Maple Park Family Campgrounds, 290 Glen Charlie Rd. in East Wareham. In existence for 50 years, Maple Park offers 400 campsites on 400 acres near a working cranberry bog operation. Its amenities include the usual water and electricity hookups, two swimming ponds, a sandy beach and a recreation hall/store/snack bar.

"We offer something for everyone," said manager Norman VanDiest.

"Space for tents, pop-up trailers, motor homes. It's a family-friendly park

and pet-friendly."

Echoing Normandy Farm's popularity with families of campers, VanDiest said the people who stay at Maple Park come back year after year.

"People have told me stories about how they started coming here as a child and practically grew up here," said VanDiest, park manager since 2012. "They've been coming here with their families year after year."

Not too far away from Maple Park, the Gateway to Cape Cod RV Resort, 90 Stevens Rd. in Rochester, fits 200 campsites on 80 acres of

land. Amenities include a trading post that sells camping needs and groceries, an outdoor swimming pool and a large pond suitable for fishing, kayaking or canoeing, though not for swimming. The camp offers a full schedule of theme weekends and daily activities and units for rent.

Like other camps in South Coast, Gateway also draws generations of campers. General Manager Marie Pettitjean said it's what she likes best about her job.

"I get to see multiple families grow," said Pettitjean. "They came here when they were children. Now coming here is the family tradition."

Pettitjean said what's unique about Gateway is that because it is part of the Equity Lifestyle family of campgrounds and resorts that span the entire country.

"We're a membership camp. You can apply for a membership that allows you access to 14 other campgrounds the company owns all over the Northeastern United States. Membership is not required, but it's a great option."

All of the above campgrounds are currently accepting reservations. Their web sites are: normandyfarms.com; forgepondcampgrounds.com; westportcampinggrounds.com; capecodmaplepark.com; ivonthego.com.

