

Serendipity: Get away from it all in laid-back Lake County

By Kyla Cathey/Lodi Living Editor

In 2003, Lynne and Bernie Butcher were looking for a new adventure. Their path led to Lake County.



“We came across this derelict hotel in a little rural town on the main road,” Bernie Butcher said.

The community of Upper Lake, where the Tallman Hotel resides, was once an active town, he said. But the world had passed it by, and the hotel that was once full of visitors had stood empty for decades.

“We thought it would be fun to bring life back to it,” Butcher said. He and his wife purchased the property and invested in a full restoration to its 1895 splendor. By 2008, the Tallman Hotel had made its way onto the California Register of Historic Places.

But the Butchers didn’t stop there.

Soon, the Blue Wing Saloon Restaurant stood nearby. The 1880s saloon was torn down

during Prohibition, but the Butchers recreated the look and feel of the pre-Prohibition watering hole. The restaurant plays host to musical events throughout the year.

They also renovated a long-vacant bank and opened the Upper Lake Mercantile, which is stocked with home, beauty and baby items created by local artisans.

“The main building — the hotel — is well-restored, but the other buildings we put around it don’t attempt to look like 1890s buildings,” Bernie Butcher said. Instead, they focused on recreating the town’s character from days gone by.

Now, they’re hoping the charming community of Upper Lake and its historic hotel will attract visitors from Lodi and the Central Valley, either as a stopping place on the way to the northern coast, or a destination on its own merits.

There’s plenty to see and do in Lake County.

Anderson Marsh State Historic Park is located on the southeast edge of Clear Lake, the oldest freshwater lake in North America. The area was once home to the Southeastern Pomo and Lake Miwok people.

In the late 1820s, European-American hunters and trappers arrived, and in 1855, the Grigsby brothers claimed the land for farming. Later, the land was owned by Scottish immigrant John Still Anderson and his family.

Visitors to the park can visit the ranch house, built in 1860 with wings added in the 1880s and 1920s. They can also hike several trails in the park.

Clear Lake State Park is also laced with trails, including a short interpretive trail that shows how the Pomo people in the area lived.

“These are great places to hike and bird watch,” Butcher said. Herons roost in the area, and plenty of other birds like the lake region.

So is Berryessa Snow Mountain National Wilderness, he said. Snow Mountain is the highest peak in Lake County, and Upper Lake is the gateway to the new national park. Butcher has created a map for visitors who want to explore the area.

Clear Lake is also a great spot for bass fishing, kayaking, and other water-based recreation, Butcher said.

On rainy days when visitors don’t want to get out into nature, Lake County is beginning to leave a footprint on the winemaking world, he added.

Several of the region’s 35 wineries offer opportunities where, like in Lodi, visitors can meet vintners and taste wine right from the source. Lake County Wine Studio, just steps away from Tallman Hotel, specializes in wines from smaller producers who don’t have tasting rooms, or only have the staff to open a few days each week.

“(The wineries) know what they can produce, but the world has not discovered them yet,” Butcher said.

In nearby Lakeport, the county courthouse has been turned into a historical museum.

“You get a good sense of the pioneers, but also the Native American culture,” Butcher said. The museum has examples of Pomo boats and baskets, along with other Native American artifacts, historical items from the pioneer era, gems and minerals, and the restored old courtroom.

There are five nearby casinos for those who want to spice up a vacation with a few games of chance: Running Creek, Robinson Rancheria, Twin Pine, Konocti Vista and Cache Creek. The casinos often bring in musical and entertainment acts, Butcher said.

And the Blue Wing Saloon holds music events four times a week, twice on Sundays, and on Monday and Tuesday evenings. Some of the bands are local, but others come up from the Bay Area or drop by while on West Coast tours.

“On a Monday night, they’d be paying a cheap motel someplace, or they can stay here in a nice hotel and have a good Monday night,” Butcher said of the musicians.

The Butchers also organize a house concert series each winter at the Meeting House theater next to their hotel.

And if you find there’s too much to do for a one-day trip, the Tallman Hotel is offering a special “Warm Up to Winter Escape” package, Butcher said. It includes a one-night stay in a

Veranda Room, steaming herbal tea or hot chocolate and fresh-baked cookies waiting in your room, complimentary wine tasting at the Lake County Wine Studio, dinner for two in the Blue Wing Saloon and continental Breakfast. For more information, call the Tallman Hotel at 707-275-2244.