

Expanding gracefully: Swan Valley Marina

Swan Valley Marina, in East Jordan, is a little smaller than the Charlevoix businesses across the lake.

But that's by design, in an effort to offer the best service to boaters in the 30-foot-and-under market. Beyond its ability to carve out a niche, Swan Valley Marina is also durable, having survived name changes, different locations and even a fire since opening in 1942. As customer demands have changed over the years, the Marina has shifted to meet them.

Now in their fifth year of ownership, Geoff and Kelly W. Britt continue to provide family-oriented service while cultivating future growth.

With a ship and party store, fuel dock, and boat and slip rental, Swan Valley Marina offers service to the regular boater, as well as those visiting the area for a week or two. Winter storage space is available, and potential customers can browse the shipyard, dock

and hoist display.

The Marina also provides authorized service to Evinrude/Johnson outboard craft, along with Mercruiser and Volvo Penta boats in the sterndrive market. The service department is headed by George Neal, who's been with Swan Valley for over 25 years. Certified as an Evinrude/Johnson Master Technician, Neal keeps up with the latest marine technology through regular study.

Keeping up with the changes is a regular task for Swan Valley, which has shifted its inventory to meet customer demand. Once upon a time, aluminum fishing boats were primarily available for rent.

"Now, it's a 22-foot ski boat, a 24-foot pontoon boat or a jetski," said Geoff Britt.

The standard boating supplies, too, have changed. As the cottage community has grown, so have the boats. Anchors, docklines and horns can now be found alongside

traditional items like tackle, bait and pop.

With the changes in maritime scenery, says Britt, has come a shortened season. For many, the fluctuation in school schedules has cut the season by two-thirds.

"Memorial to Labor day used to be your summer season," he said. "But that's really not true anymore. We still launch boats as late as the Fourth of July — and we start taking them out in mid-August."

The ensuing dramatic, short burst of activity can sometimes produce a hectic scramble to get out the door and into the water. Upon arrival, it's not uncommon for the bliss to overpower one's memory. Relax, though—Swan Valley offers special "house accounts" to make transactions simpler. Automatically available for regular storage customers, new accounts can also be set up after presentation of a credit card. Once established, all of the



An aerial shot of Swan Valley Marina.

required items during a stay can then be accepted with a signature.

"They don't have to come here with their wallet each time," Britt said. "They can pull up to the dock and get a full tank of gas and we'll just bill them."

It's this kind of face-to-face business, say the Brittts, that distinguishes their marina from larger competitors. After harboring hopes for running a marina, Geoff and Kelly W. Britt found that Swan Valley

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