

# The Wildwood Sanctuary

by Petula Brown

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In the spirit of full disclosure, I must admit that, as a city girl, a getaway in the country doesn't have the same appeal as a weekend spa retreat. So I wouldn't think to look toward the wooded landscapes between Kalamazoo and Paw Paw for a place that combines the best of both worlds...until I entered suites at The Sanctuary at Wildwood (<http://www.sanctuaryatwildwood.com/>). I was amazed by interiors using headboards of elm, dogwood and ironwood to complement nature-inspired wall murals to crystallize the vision of innkeeper Dick Buerkle to "bring the outdoors in." Yet, there were also suite amenities I would expect to find in any upscale getaway—a fireplace and Jacuzzi. Before my Sanctuary experience, I could not have imagined finding a place that could marry the serenity of nature and modern conveniences with such cohesiveness a couple hours away from Ann Arbor. Wildwood was a welcomed surprise.

Since acquiring the property's 90+ acres in 1995, Dick and his wife Dolly have brought knowledge from their experiences living across the country to guests looking for a place that can provide a restful getaway on their terms. Interiors inspired by travels to Lake Placid, New York and Colorado Springs set the tone for a relaxing experience. Other facets of a guest's stay can be customized to accommodate unique needs with the help of Dick's years of experience managing recreation programs for local governments across the country. Need time on the water to decompress? The Sanctuary will facilitate planning of canoe excursions. Looking for a low key getaway to reconnect with your partner? A romantic package can be arranged that includes dinner at a local restaurant. Prefer the tranquility of solo retreat? Enjoy time by the fireplace, in the Jacuzzi or on a few of the nearly five miles of walking trails to relax, refresh and renew.

The appeal of Wildwood is apparent in the journal entries left by guests in notebooks kept in each suite.

"I couldn't have dreamed up a more perfect place for my 'solitude retreat'!....The cabin is fantastic (and

I'm very particular about décor)! You left nothing out...I joyfully walked the trails, gazed on the front porch chair, bird watched from the kitchenette, soaked in the tub by candle light, loved the massage in my room and did a lot of what I came here for; read, write, draw, yoga and meditation...."

"What a perfect place to reflect and de-stress! Dick and Dolly made us feel welcome and part of their family—the breakfast was a beautiful beginning to our days here!"

The serene landscape and extensive suite amenities make The Sanctuary a great option for individual guests as well as couples, but conference facilities also provide a venue for Wildwood to plan special events and attract groups for personal and business activities. Events like the Cayman Pool Party (where Dick and Dolly share goodies from trips to the islands) and the Chuckwagon Dinner (complete with campfire, hayrides and marshmallow roasts) are offered several times a year. They are a great way to meet fellow guests or get to know Wildwood in a more structured setting. Visiting the Sanctuary during a weekend scrapbooking retreat planned by Creative Memories' Melissa Seager, I appreciated how the site's positive energy infused a group engaged in a very un-outdoorsy activity. Attendees took breaks from scrapbooking to explore the trails and gaze at the pond a few steps from the main facility. A few even scheduled to attend a fall 2006 scrapbooking retreat at Wildwood as well as couples getaways. "I've already made plans to celebrate my wedding anniversary here this year," commented one retreat attendee.

While far removed from the hustle of urban and suburban living, the Sanctuary and the surrounding area has gain notoriety on several fronts. The bed and breakfast has been recognized as the "Best for Rest and Relaxation" via an Official 2006 Book of Lists Award and as a top bed and breakfast in North America in Arringtons' 2006 Book of Lists. Resident cook Dolly gets rave reviews from guests, but visitors can also explore a range of dining options in the area, including the eclectic Bistro

120 (recent offerings included Steamed Fresh Clams And Mussels Over Squid Ink Linguine and Guinness Steak), the casual Bud's Bar (known for great hamburgers) and the lakefront Fisher Lake Inn (with its focus on seafood fare). As part of the Michigan Heritage Water Trails, the River Country segment includes regions near Colon, Mendon and Three Rivers where travelers can explore historical, cultural and natural points of interest.

Looking to make a trip out West a reality? The Sanctuary's Web site is a great resource to learn about upcoming activities and basic logistics information, but a discussion with Dick is a great way to create customized activities unique to your needs. Thinking about a family getaway with the kids? Try making an exploratory trip to determine whether the laid back venue is a good fit with kids' personalities and expectations. Interested in having a group event for 20-30 people with accommodations and dining readily available for multi-day activities? Consider renting the entire facility at rates lower than is often seen at hotel-based conference facilities. Looking for a serene but affordable getaway? Spend the weekend exploring the trails, relaxing in your Jacuzzi or reading by the fireplace.

After my Western Michigan excursion, I have a greater appreciation of the region and its offerings. Thanks to the Sanctuary, vacationers can enjoy the area's natural beauty without pitching tents (a welcomed relief for non-campers everywhere).

For more information, contact The Sanctuary at Wildwood at [info@sanctuaryatwildwood.com](mailto:info@sanctuaryatwildwood.com) or call 800-249-5910.

## Upcoming Events and Area Activities

### May 11-20

Dowagiac Dogwood Fine Arts Festival  
[www.DogwoodFineArts.org](http://www.DogwoodFineArts.org)

### May 21

Blessing of the Bikes  
[www.BlessingOfTheBikes.org](http://www.BlessingOfTheBikes.org)

### June 15-17

50th Annual Three Rivers Water Festival  
[www.TRChamber.com/waterfest.asp](http://www.TRChamber.com/waterfest.asp)

### July 4<sup>th</sup> Weekend

Cayman Pool Party

### July 2<sup>nd</sup> Weekend

Cayman Pool Party

### July 3<sup>rd</sup> & 5<sup>th</sup> Weekend

Wildwood Chuckwagon Dinner

### August 3-6

Colon Magic Festival  
[www.RiverCountry.com/magic.asp](http://www.RiverCountry.com/magic.asp)

### August 2<sup>nd</sup> & 4<sup>th</sup> Weekend

Wildwood Chuckwagon Dinner