

Deer Park Lodge

By Kay Krans

Music was a very important part of entertainment at Deer Park Lodge. *The Chicago Tribune* ran an ad in 1961 that read, "at night Deer Park Lodge is gay and carefree; you can 'live it up.'" The ad went on to state that entertainment varies each evening but included live music and dancing.

In the winter of 1959, a group of five University of Wisconsin students answered an ad in the *Milwaukee Journal* that was placed by Ben Epstein of Deer Park Lodge. He wanted to hire a band for the summer of 1960 for the lodge and for Mrs. Epstein's parents' resort, Eagle Waters Resort in Eagle River. The boys were from Fond du Lac, Milwaukee and Wisconsin Rapids.

On a winter evening, the band hauled their instruments to Whitefish Bay and auditioned for the job in the Epstein's winter home. They played in the living room and were hired on the spot.

As the summer began, they drove up US 51 in a 1950 Chevrolet with a homemade trailer to bring their music to the Northwoods. They built a music stand with a logo for the Johnny Paul Quintet, which included Bob Schmidt (drummer), John Leisenring (trombone), Dave Van Valkenberg (piano and keyboards), Larry Skeels (bass), and Mike George (trumpet).

The band members were good friends and enjoyed playing music together. The job included room and board plus salary, and they played two nights at Deer Park and two nights at Eagle Waters with three nights off. The boys said the housing and food were great at Eagle Waters, and it was a resort that attracted an older crowd. Deer Park Lodge didn't feed them as well, and they lived over the machine shop. There wasn't a lot of sleeping there, because the carpenter had tools operating early in the morning!

The Epsteins hired other college students from all over the Midwest to staff the lodge and that was the place for their social life. They loved the clientele at Deer Park, because it was a family resort. The families enjoyed the evenings in the Deer Park Lodge Recreation Center, which had table tennis, other indoor games, a bar and a dance floor. It was a meeting place for families as was the heated swimming pool. In the early evening, the whole family came to dance, and then the adults would return for the later evening dances, enjoying drinks and snacks.

The band had their days to enjoy the sun, play sheephead, and explore the Northwoods. It was a great summer job, and they likely brought back to Madison as much money as a college kid could save in the summer.