

High Crest Lake 1949 - 1984

High Crest Lake began in 1949 when Seckler and Sheppard, developers of Lake Wallkill and Highland Lakes purchased 235 acres, the first section of High Crest, from Pequannock Rubber and the Borough of Butler. The farmland was full of blueberry patches at the top of the hill and the stream that tumbles down the mountain ran along the property where the Lake is now. A dam was built at the southern end and the Lake was formed. There were two bodies of water initially with a narrow strip of land separating the "Duck Pond", now the cove, from the lake proper.

Of the original settlers only the Novacks and the Winterbergers are still here. They were joined in the next two years by the Pirogs, Giles, William Johnsons and the Starrs. The eight children living here then were picked up by a Seckler & Sheppard station wagon and taken to the bus stop on Rte. 23. They attended a one-room school house in Echo Lake that stood where St. Joseph's school now stands. One of these students was Kenny Giles; and as a graduating senior from Butler High School, his sister, Margie, received the first scholarship ever awarded a West Milford student by the W.M.P.T.A. Margie attended Radford College and is now head of Women's Physical Education at Butler High School. Her neighbor, Joanie Winterberger, graduated the following year and is now Mrs. Campbell known to many of the children in the W.M. school system physical education program.

By 1956 there were about seventy homes here. The nearest supermarkets were a Big Leader in Bloomingdale and an Acme in Klugetown, Pompton Lakes. Chilton Hospital was just opening its original building, and the Hodges Doughertys, Gasalbertis, Gruelichs and Gentiles had moved to High Crest.

Macopin Elementary School was built in 1959 and later expanded to our present middle school. The school served as the high school for a few years and the first senior class graduated in 1963 with Mike Begley and Kenny Giles among them. Marshall Hill was followed by Upper Greenwood Lake School and then Ipshawa in October, 1966. Now the children of High Crest were "walkers". Maple Road opened in 1968 and West Brook just seven years after.

The first High Crest Lake Lodge was built in 1959 when thirty residents demolished a log cabin on Rte. 23 and moved it to the Kay Len Pavillion constructing what is now the lounge area. The larger room was added in 1968 when the property was purchased from Mr. Seckler. The kitchen was the most recent addition with continuing work being done on the tennis courts. Almost all the work has been done by residents in group work programs.

When the lake was purchased by the Lodge in 1973 our new water front was constructed with added improvements by the Sailfish Club and Women's Club. The Recreation program, now operated by the Lodge, has over two hundred children enrolled. A very active Sailfish Club and a Ski Club have developed to provide year-round recreation for the entire family and more than two hundred and thirty families call High Crest "home".

Some interesting facts of people's lives here at High Crest are: A baby was born at the lake -- Ricky Novak. Neighbors married -- Kurt Gruelich and Gloria Kolen, Peter Winterberger and Carol Giuseffi. More than sixteen families are in their second High Crest homes and two "High Crest kids" have married and returned with their families. Quite a testimonial to this remote blueberry patch. There is a strong bond of warmth and friendship that has nurtured around the shores of this lake and I'm happy to call it home.

The one-room school house was no longer used and Hillcrest, West Milford's first K-8 elementary school, was joined by Paradise Knoll. The high school students were enrolled in Butler High, not a long trip for the children, but from Upper Greenwood Lake the West Milford students rode two hours each way to high school.

In 1956 East Shore Dr. ended at Hodges' corner and Macopin Terrace continued only a few hundred yards. Neither Mallory on the lower portion of Upper High Crest were opened and West Shore ended at Deacon's corner. Kay Len was purchased by Mr. Seckler in 1956. It had been a public swimming area and the children used to walk through the woods and buy candy bars there. Northwood Dr. was cut through in 1958, giving High Crest a "back gate". The entrance was closed by a chain for a while and residents needed their key to get in and out of High Crest Lake. In 1963 water meters were installed and the residents began paying their first water bills.

In the early days there was an active Men's Club that provided social activities for the residents and at one time stocked the lake with fish. The Women's Club began with sixteen women meeting in their homes and was neither federated nor incorporated.

The Recreation Program, under the auspices of the newly incorporated Women's Club, was begun in 1964 by Roberta Caporale, then president. Mr. Seckler provided the insurance and payroll contributions and Bill Smith was our first director. The forty-eight children involved had arts and crafts and field activities in the morning, swim instruction in the afternoon. Every Friday a field trip with station wagon transportation was offered.

Interview with : Ed Novak
Address : 73 High Crest Drive
In Residence : 1951

High Crest Lake was originally owned by the Pequannock Rubber Company and the Borough of Butler. They were planning to make a reservoir out of the eighty acres of land. Seckler and Shepard bought it and opened it to the public in 1951. Although I can say when it opened in one sentence, it would take several sentences to tell you how. It took a year and a half to build the dam and was finished in 1951. It was flooded in the same year. High Crest Water Company was started in 1951 and didn't charge its customers for eleven years, until 1962. The lake was formed from a river to a lake in a year. The master plan for High Crest was residential. High Crest Lake covers 250 acres. The beach was built in 1951.

The community was advertised in the Newark Star Ledger, the Passaic Herald News, and the Paterson Morning Call. The biggest drawback for the lake was the entrance. This long, winding hill was very hard to get up, especially in the winter.

There were a few problems with the water tanks in the beginning and people would bring water to their homes in milk cans. Another unusual thing is that the first thirteen children that were born on High Crest were all boys.

Note: Mr. Novak is the son-in-law of one of the developers, Mr. Seckler, the owner of High Crest Lake Water Company, and one of the first home owners.

Interview with : Goe and Dotty Winterberger

Address : 82 High Crest Drive

In Residence : 1952

What was High Crest like when you moved in?

"Well, there was a dirt road, there weren't many houses around, and there wasn't a lake, just a pond."

Do you have any unusual stories?

"There was no bridge in the beginning, just a dam. The dam flooded over and a neighbor on the other side of the dam would have to take showers at our house after work because of the condition of the dam. Finally, the dam washed out and they decided to build a bridge."

"There was an elderly man named John Smith who would rescue people in the bad snow storms with his white horse, Kitt. He would go to the long hill, the front entrance from Rte. 23, and would hook chains from his horse to the helpless cars. Then he would pull with his horse and the car would be on its way again. On a nice day Mrs. Smith would take Kitt out in the field and give the children rides."

How old were your children when you moved here?

"Two of our children were in grammar school and one was too young to be in school."

What were the schools like?

"Some of the schools at the time had outside bathrooms. They were small schoolhouses. Two of the schools that our children attended were Hillcrest and St. Josephs."

How many families and how many children were there at High Crest when you moved in?

"There weren't many children, about seven girls and two boys. At the time there were only about ten to fifteen families."

Winterberger interview cont.

Were there many animals around?

"Every now and then you'd see deer grazing in the back lawn, ground hogs up on their hinds sniffing around, skunk spreading their famous aroma, muskrats, and also talk of wildcat.

Do you know any of the history of this area?

"There were a lot of Indian caves at the top of the hill by Upper High Crest Dr. such as the Hermit Cave.

What were the living conditions like?

"Roads - there were gravel roads. Front hill - in terrible shape in the winter and in the winter we had fine ice skating. We seemed to have harsher winters then. There wasn't any beach in the beginning. In the winter we had sail-skating."

What was the overall "flavor" of the community then?

"All the people were very nice and they wouldn't interfere with what you wanted to do."

Interview with : Jan Ives
Address: 105 Upper High Crest Road
In Residence : January 23, 1952
Moved : 1969
Second Residence : 1982

High Crest was a great place to grow up. There were a lot of kids around my age. It was like a perfect model community. We would go fishing, hike up by the reservoir in the woods, ski in the winter, sailboat in the summer, and bicycle ride. We would do whatever any teenager would do.

Back then there was a guy named the Dugen Man. He was like the ice cream man as compared to today. He would come around the lake selling cakes, cupcakes, and bread.

I remember when I would go fishing, there was one fish that I could never catch but I had on my line numerous times. I named him Alflagabacka.

High Crest is basically the same, but when I left the road didn't totally go around the lake. There was also a field to the right of the dam where we used to play baseball.

I loved High Crest Lake so much as a kid that I wanted my children to have the same benefit. So when I got married and had children, I moved back.

Note :

Jan Ives was the first baby born to a family living at High Crest.

Interview with : Ed and Joyce Gentile
Address : 174 High Crest Drive
In Residence : 1955

Where did you live before coming to High Crest Lake?

"We lived in Lincoln Park."

What do you like about High Crest as compared to where you lived before?

"We came to High Crest when it was first being built to give an estimate for heating. We were impressed by the lake, the mountains, and just the general area."

What was it like when you moved in?

"We were the first to build on this side of the lake and at the time there was just a path leading to our house. We were about the forty-first family to move into High Crest."

Do you have any unusual stories that you'd like to share?

"Well, something that was very unusual to me is what the Men's Club did. They would stock the lake for fishing, have picnics all the time. It was a very close community and still is. If there is tragedy, we all pull together to comfort one another. If there's a picnic we all pull together to have fun."

"As I had mentioned before, the road ended about one hundred yards before our house and there was just a path leading to our house when it was being built. Therefore, we had to carry the supplies for constructing the house in our arms and sometimes in sleighs. There was also no electric when we moved in during November. We had to use kerosene."

Did you see any wild animals since you first moved in?

"There were plenty of deer around and skunk, also. Once in a while you'd see a ground hog peeking out of its dirt mound."

Gentile interview cont.

What unusual living conditions did you have to go through?

"The water was very carefully controlled thanks to Roger Daugherty. There weren't any roads for the first couple of years. Seckler and Shepard had them plowed for us until the town took control of the roads. The weather -- It seems as though we, living at High Crest, get more severe winds because they blow down through the Apskawa Pass."

How were the schools?

"Our first few children attended Paradise Knolls, Hillcrest, and Butler High School. Our two last children attended Apskawa School which was on the lake. The schooling and school teaching always seemed to be above average."

About how many children were there in the neighborhood?

"There were about forty families and fifty kids when we moved in."

What activities did High Crest Lake participate in from the Township?

"We didn't really participate as a group with the town but there was always a big High Crest crowd at all of the activities, such as football games and band competition."

Did High Crest people support West Milford in anyway such as in public office?

"Mr. Dudley Rodgers ran for office, Stewart Perry ran for Town Council, Mrs. Novack was on the Board of Education, Howard Simpson was on the Board of Health, Roger Daugherty, Michael Nestico, and Ed Novack were all on the Planning Board, and I, myself, was on the Bicentennial Committee."

What role, if any, did you play in the community?

"I was the President of the Lodge when it was first formed and also on the Lodge Board for ten years. I was the President of the Chamber of Commerce and then in the club for twenty years."

What do you think of the overall "flavor" of the community in the beginning?

"Most everyone who lived here in the beginning was of young families moving into an area mortgaged beyond their means. Therefore, everyone was very close."

Gentile interview cont.

What was the "flavor" like of the community ten years ago?

"High Crest populated very well. Everyone was very friendly. The atmosphere that prevailed in the beginning lasted through. Most people were moving up the corporate ladder. It was a great place. I had never seen a place like this where people moved in and they were part of the crowd right away."

How is the "flavor" now?

"It's a fine community but it changed a little bit. It's harder to know everyone because of the population rise. High Crest always pulls together in tragedy."

Do you know any of the history of High Crest Lake?

"Well, it was first owned by Mr. Smith. At first it was a swamp and then they dug it out. The first family I believe to move in was the Ansel's."

What were some activities that were run around High Crest?

"There was Lorelei, swimming competition, swimming lessons, great winter sports, family picnics, and the Fourth of July Parade."

Any other comments?

"High Crest is definitely a great place to raise children!"

Interview with: Roger Daugherty
Address: 269 High Crest Drive
In Residence: November 30, 1967
Prior Residence: Westwood, N.J. - Bergen County

How would you compare High Crest to where you lived before?

"Westwood was residential and High Crest was more rural because of the lake. We checked every lake in northern New Jersey and High Crest had just opened. We designed a house and noticed the nice lake. It (High Crest) is conveniently located because it's easy to get from New York to here. It was an all-year-round lake; therefore, it had no summer residences. I also liked the zoning."

What was High Crest like when you moved in?

"The roads were privately owned by Seckler and Shepard and in poor shape. I got involved in getting the roads accepted by the town. There were a few mistakes made in the engineering but good progressive steps were taken."

Do you have any unusual stories?

"There were frequent power outages in the beginning; therefore, we had to buy a propane gas stove. The water has failed a few times but no major problems."

Did you see many animals?

"I've seen a lot of snakes, deer, and turtles. I have seen a lot of wild animals up in West Milford."

How did High Crest participate in the Township?

"Well, Richard Meany is on the Environmental Board, Ed Novack is on the Planning Board, Mike Nestico is also on the Planning Board and the Board of Health. I was the Chairman of the Environmental Board and a member for ten years. Ed Novack was the Vice-Chairman. I am a former member and Chairman of the Planning Board."

Daugherty interview cont.

You've had many interacting roles with the town and the state. Could you tell me about that?

"I have been on the Water Study Committee and have conducted underground water studies for West Milford with about three-thousand wells. I made a study on recycling solid waste and adopted recommendations for what will occur on April first. What will happen is that you'll have to separate your garbage into glass, paper, or food."

How can the condition of High Crest Lake be compared with other area lakes?

"High Crest has a pretty low bacteria count but like most lakes, grows a lot of seaweed on the lake floor."

Lake water condition twenty years ago?

"When I would go fishing I could smell the leaking septic which came from the storm drains that emptied into the lake. Some of the inlets on the lake were restricted from swimming because the bacteria count was too high. This was caused by leaky septic tanks which would let the bacteria into the storm drains. Then the septic would lead its way into the lake."

Lake water condition ten years ago?

"Well, it took almost a year and a half to pick up on and learn the cause for this pollution. We started a program to run down the sources of the problem. We marked out all the storm basins and noticed that it came from the house on Macopin Terrace and around that block. Of course, it came from a lot of other houses but that is where the count was the highest. Another cause for this pollution is the Canadian geese that swim in the lake."

Lake water condition now?

"High Crest is very fortunate for having such clean water. Also, every house is located within one thousand feet of a fire hydrant. Because of this the