

A familiar name for Resorter of Year

By **RENEE RICHARDSON**
Senior Reporter

Chris Ruttger, who has continued the family resort tradition in Deerwood, was named 2009 Minnesota Resorter of the Year.

The announcement came as a surprise Tuesday at the Minnesota Resort and Campground Association's annual fall meeting. Ruttger has watched the presentation for years and did not suspect this time would be different. He gradually realized the life story being told in photos was his own when he saw a suspect baby photo.

"They all figured out ways to fool me," he said of family members who attended the event.

Ruttger, vice president of Ruttger's Bay Lake Lodge in Deerwood, learned the varied aspects of resort operations at a young age growing up on the resort that now covers 500 acres.

He oversees the operation, which includes two golf courses, tennis courts, swimming pools, marina, 140 guest accommodations, convention center, three restaurants, coffee shop and retail stores. Ruttger is the 29th recipient of the award.

The photo presentation displayed his life, including a disco era he said may have been better if forgotten.

"You can't accept anything like this on your own merit," Ruttger said. "It's the staff and my family - and my ancestors who started the whole place - without that it wouldn't happen."

It wasn't until he looked at the list of past award honorees that Ruttger realized his father, Jack Ruttger, was the award's first recipient in 1981.

Ruttger said when he looked around the room at all the people who put such an effort into the industry, it didn't seem as though he should be the one getting the award.

"I just appreciate it," he said. "Inside you don't know if you feel worthy, but you just enjoy it and appreciate it."

Growing up on the resort, Ruttger's experience included a variety of jobs, including resident magician. The resort had Wednesday talent shows with guests and staff taking part. When Ruttger was a boy, he talked the organizer into letting him enter as a magician - a role he continued for years.

"I never was any good at it," Ruttger said, noting guests still come up and kid him about his time as a magician. "Actually, it became more of a comedy routine."

Ruttger said people who previously received the award are resorters he's looked up to and gaining this honor points to another phase of his career. It comes at a time when the resort and tourism industry is looking to the future. Ruttger said an industry trend comes from people who want to try something other than a brand hotel and are looking for a personal experience.

A 1980 Brainerd High School graduate, Ruttger continued his education at Cornell University in Ithaca, N.Y., graduating with a bachelor's degree in hotel administration.

As a college student, Ruttger spent a summer as an intern at the Grand Hotel on Mackinac Island. After college, he worked at the Normandy Inn in Minneapolis.

In 1985, he returned to central Minnesota's lake country and became the assistant manager at his family's resort. Ten years later he became the resort's general manager.

Ruttger's Bay Lake Lodge traces its roots back to 1898 with Ruttger's great-grandparents Joe and Josephine Ruttger. The baton was passed to his grandparents, Alec and Myrle, in the early 1920s. His parents, Jack and Ann, took the reins in 1955.

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Chris Ruttger, president of Ruttger's Bay Lake Lodge in Deerwood, was named Minnesota Resorter of the Year for 2009 by the Minnesota Resort and Campground Association.

Past area **Resorter of the Year Award** winners include:

- Mark Ronnei, Grand View Lodge, Nisswa, 2006.
- Mayva Kottke, Don & Mayva's Crow Wing Campground, Brainerd, 2005.
- Dave Gradvahl, Breezy Point Resort, 2004.
- John Kavanaugh, Kavanaugh's Resort, Brainerd, 2000.
- Dee Sullivan, Sullivan's Resort & Campground, Brainerd, 1996.
- Joe Mac McGuire, McGuire's Piney Ridge, Pine River, 1989.
- Sherm Kavanaugh, Kavanaugh's Resort, Brainerd, 1988.
- Roger Schwieters, Boyd Lodge, Crosslake, 1985.
- John Arnold, Madden's on Gull Lake, Brainerd, 1984.
- Sue Leagjeld, Driftwood Family Resort, Pine River, 1983.
- Fred Boos, Grand View Lodge, Brainerd, 1982.
- Jack Ruttger, Ruttger's Bay Lake Lodge, Deerwood, 1981.