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Style | Relationships | Home



BUNKER HILL FARMS

LIFE

## *Luxury that supports charity*

Bunker Hill Farms, a little-known, invitation-only resort in Woodstock, is now open to the public as a way to raise money for local nonprofits

# Luxury for charity

Invitation-only resort in Woodstock, with golf course, is open to the public and all about humanitarianism



The Treetop Silo Spa has a ground-level botanical garden. BUNKER HILL FARMS PHOTOS

By Danielle Braff  
For the Chicago Tribune

When a travel writer (hi) and her editor had not heard of a resort just 60 miles outside their backyards, you know it's an exclusive property.

More than exclusive, Bunker Hill Farms was an invitation-only vacation spot in Woodstock that drew the likes of musicians Steven Tyler and Darius Rucker and many other celebrities.

But when the 450-acre farm decided to start accepting rentals from anyone willing to fork over \$1,150 per day plus a one-time fee of \$500, it got my attention — and the attention of others in the Chicago area who had been relegated to taking nearby vacations in Wisconsin or southwest Michigan.

Now Chicagoans can book a holiday in Woodstock, the Illinois farming community made famous for its brief appearance in the movie "Groundhog Day."

Bunker Hill Farms was created by Mike Domek, who made his fortune by founding ticketnow.com and selling it to TicketMaster in 2008 for \$265 million. He and his wife, Amy, started building their dream vacation home in 2005, tossing in all his holiday fantasies, big and small: an 18-hole golf course; a 70-foot manufactured lake; a 7,300-square-foot lodge with a 7,000-square-foot terrace; a sledding hill and about 15 miles of trails for riding all-terrain vehicles and cycling.

What started with 150 acres has grown to more than 450 acres. But it became clear almost immediately that this vacation property, which sleeps 20, including all the land enveloping the McHenry County farm, was the ideal place for entertaining and was grand enough to host celebrities.

Former Cubs player Anthony Rizzo once said the property is "the perfect place to sit back and relax with good friends."

He wasn't the only one. Domek started inviting celebrity friends to perform at his home for charity and that idea evolved into what it is today: A vacation spot in the middle of unsuspecting farmland where anyone can visit and every penny earned is donated to Bunker Hill Charities.

The nonprofit has raised more than \$2.1 million in the past eight years for more than 100 local charities, including the Red Cross, Big Brothers Big Sisters and the Rotary Foundation. And yes, this means that when you book a retreat or a vacation here, it's tax deductible.

While the charity aspect makes the steep price tag more tolerable, it's the amenities that push Bunker Hill Farms into the luxury vacation category. The stay is all-inclusive, and it comes with a private chef. There's a jacuzzi; a shooting range decorated with a chandelier; a spa inside an old grain silo with a glass floor so you can be massaged while viewing the botanical garden below;



The Treetop Silo Spa has glass floor panels that looks down on the botanical garden below.



The Bunker Hill Farms property has a shooting pavilion with five skeet throwers.



The Bunker Hill Farms property has a par-72 golf course.

an event venue that has hosted musicians such as Bret Michaels, Creed and Cheap Trick; skiing; snowshoeing and illuminated walks along the trails.

Oh, and there's the par-72 golf course, which was named "Most exclusive golf course" by Chicago Golf Report. The course was designed by local landscape architect Harry Vignocchi, and it opened in 2011 with Michaels making a ceremonial swing on the first tee and performing a concert at the property. Even the golf carts are luxurious, featuring Bluetooth speakers and

stocked coolers.

It took two years to build the golf course because of the need to dig the 70-foot lake, which would become the irrigation source for the course. Turtles, yellow perch, walleye, big mouth bass and trout call this lake home.

At Bunker Hill Farms, guests can customize their stay, with some patrons requesting hot air balloon rides and helicopter rides.

A 30-obstacle mud run was created on the property in 2013, and has become an annual event called The Muddy Bunker. It has raised

more than \$500,000 for charity. Another charity event featured a concert by Tyler Hubbard of the former musical duo Florida Georgia Line.

Bunker Hill Farms books only one group at a time, making it appealing to companies looking for retreats or families seeking an exclusive reunion. Visitors can schedule a cooking class with executive chef Mario Scordato, owner of Home School of Cooking, and can learn how to make meals like homemade pasta with grilled chicken, grilled zucchini and a salad straight from the McHenry County farmer's market with homemade dressing.

"What truly makes Bunker Hill special is the experience we provide," Domek says. "From the initial cold towel greeting and executive chef to our ATV tour, shooting pavilion and private golf course, we really make the entire day fun-filled, unique and completely curated to them."

The resort has become a popular — but still under-the-radar — spot to vacation or to hold a corporate retreat. Don't bother looking for a Yelp review of the property; there are none to date.

About 70% of the guests here are corporate, while the rest are private. Most people, however, still have never heard of Bunker Hill Farms, even if they live within a few miles of the property.

Ed Ditusa of Wonder Lake visited Bunker Hill Farms a couple of times: Once when the property was invitation only, and recently in May to play golf and attend a concert. He lives just 20 minutes from the property but hadn't discovered it until a friend invited him to play golf there.

"The thing about Bunker Hill Farms is that nobody knows it exists," Ditusa said. "It's a hidden gem in McHenry County surrounded by farmland. And you have this golf paradise that you can't match anywhere else."

Danielle Braff is a freelancer.