

CAMPGROUND PEOPLE

By RAY LAROCQUE

*'They fill up,
even in the
middle of winter!'*

THE DANIELS FAMILY gets together on a busy day (a difficult task). Front row (left to right), are: Jeannette (mother), daughter Janis (who works the office), and son Bob. Back row, (left to right), Al and wife Doris (she heads recreation program), and Norman (father). Not present are Bob's wife Patsy, a nurse, and Al and Doris' daughter Marcia, who works in the store.



What makes this campground so unique? It's the people who run it—the Daniels family, of NORMANDY FARMS, Foxboro, Mass.

The Daniels campground is an enviable operation, a success that has won the admiration not only of campers but of fellow campground operators. Said the other operators: "It's a model for all of us," "A fantastically successful operation," "it's beautiful, but functional." "Just what a well-run place ought to be."

One campground owner made it imperative for me to visit Normandy Farms when he said: "Most of us strive to fill up

every weekend in the summer. At Normandy Farms, they fill up on weekends, even in the middle of winter!"

I had met Al Daniels and his wife Doris at campground owner functions and I had a nodding acquaintance with father, Norman. I found that trying to get them all together in one place for a chat was not easy. They ARE busy people.

Even when all were at the campground, some had duties they could not relinquish. Some have other jobs and were away. But most of us managed to get together on a pleasant afternoon in Foxboro and we sat around a big picnic table overlooking the

campground as we talked about how it all started.

Before we get into that, though, let me introduce each of them so that when their names come up you can readily know who they are. Today's Daniels are the sixth, seventh and eighth generations of a family that has run the farm for more than 220 years.

There is Norman and Jeannette, mother and father. Then there is the seventh generation, son Albert (Known as "Dan"), his wife Doris, son Bob and his wife Patsy, and daughter Janis. Next come the grandchildren, Marcia, Marc and Kristine (who belong to Dan and Doris), and

Andrea and Shawn (who are Bob and Patsy's children).

How it all started is not really much of a story. But what it has accomplished is. Norman told me after the interview that in all the years Normandy Farms was a working family farm he had not been able to involve the whole family in the operation. Now that it is a campground, though the whole family is involved. It's the way it was centuries ago.

Why start a campground?

It was a case of running out of land, according to Norman. They had a farm with 30,000 birds and 400 to 500 sheep. The public was getting uptight about the smell of animals. "It smelled good to a farmer, but the neighbors complained," he said.

The Daniels looked into all kinds of things, from condominiums to selling some of the land for apartments or homes. "But it had been in the family some 200 years and we hated to part with it," Norman said. "So,

we settled for a campground."

None of the Daniels had ever camped. "We never even knew anybody who camped," said Jeannette. But with the help of Mal Currier of North of Highlands Camping Area on Cape Cod, they got started in spite of those who said the campground was too close to Boston and other cities.

That proved to be an asset, of course, in years when gasoline was scarce and now with fuel costing as much as it does. Was turning the two-century old farm into a camping place the right decision?

"If I had to do it over, I not only would make the same decision, I'd do it sooner," said Norman. "I love it. I'm crazy about it. I REALLY like it. I get myself so wound up in it, I want to do so much, and I get so excited about it that I tire more quickly than I'd like to. I really like to meet people. As Dan says, I like things fixed up nice so the customer feels like he is

really needed, really wanted and respected."

The past year the campground achieved an 86 percent occupancy over a seven month period, almost unheard of in the campground industry.

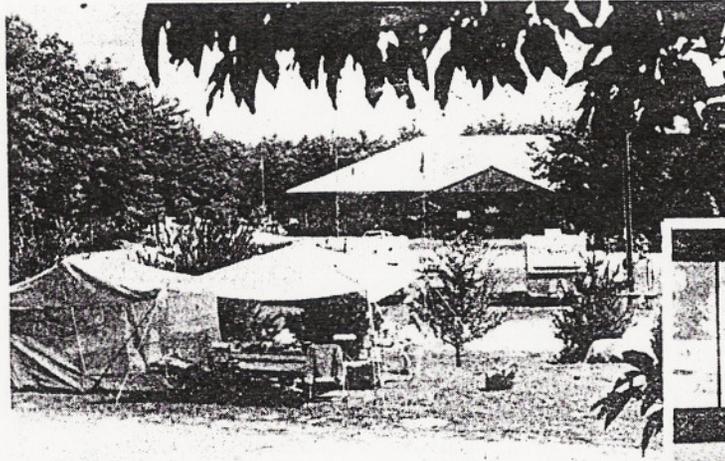
That concern for the customer is really the key to the success of Normandy Farms, I think. The Daniels all are dedicated people. They really are serious about what they're doing. They want to be the best and work hard toward it.

Dan puts it this way: "It's the quality, not the quantity of what we have." But those who have been to Normandy Farms know there is quantity there, too. There are now 300 sites (the goal is 500) in beautiful, rolling fields and under tall trees laid out in a manner that the place never looks crowded, even when filled.

There is a two-story recreation hall with all sorts of rooms for a variety of activity. Normandy Farms has two pools, one indoors, another outdoors and there are plans, I'm told, for a third. There is a whirlpool bath and sauna. There are rooms for crafts and for indoor games.

Doris plans and runs the recreation program. It is her imagination and the involvement of campers that makes it one of the most successful in the industry. The recreation program is a major reason Normandy farms can fill up on weekends even in winter.

"In winter, we put on a major type recreation every other weekend," said Dan. "We go in for costumes, decorations, everything to provide the atmosphere. There are signs, we



OPEN SITES are convenient to large rec hall.

have popcorn at movies. It's the quality of things that makes success rather than doing a lot of things half way."

In the beginning, Normandy Farms was just a place to camp. Growth has been steady. This is their 9th year. "I think our two biggest assets," said Dan, "are the rest rooms and the pool. The rest rooms after 8-10 years of use still are excellent. They were really modern for their day. The pool always was a big attraction."

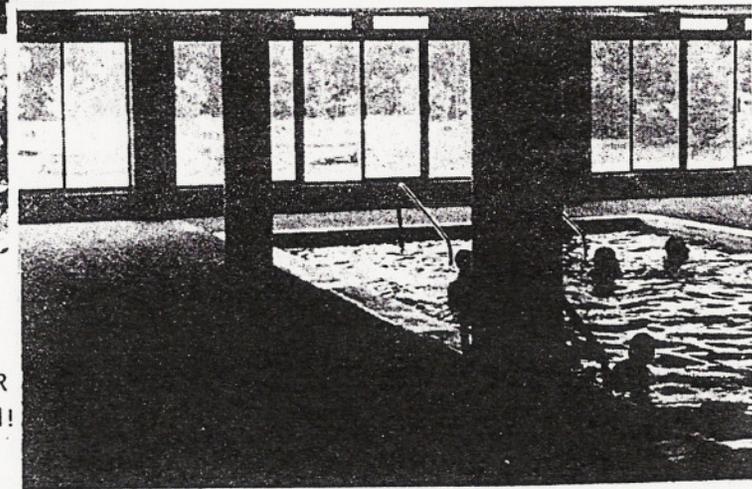
Mother and Father Daniels travel a lot, leaving the campground to the children. But their travels always are with camping in mind. Jeannette says Norman takes a shower in each campground he visits and studies the showers carefully. He studies each campground hoping to bring home an idea or two, she said.

Normandy readily admits this. "It's a net thing of mine," he told me. "Someday I'd like to come up with a rest room that would be the blueprint for the

industry. I'd like it to be an almost perfect one. Not because I want to be the big deal. I think it is the one thing that is holding up the industry. We are all in this together."

This feeling of being a part of things, the enthusiasm for making the campground the best is even instilled in the young ones. Doris told me: "The boy is 9 and he's thinking about it (his future in the campground). But Krissie, she's 5 and she has decided she's going to run the place."

Dan sums it up. "Our policies are working. The place runs and perpetuates itself. Bob and I can now take vacations in the summer. We have a good staff,



SWIM ALL WINTER in the indoor pool!

almost 40 this year, 10 of us all year."

To me the formula for success at Normandy Farms seems pretty obvious. Everybody works, works hard, at one important thing—pleasing the customer.

(Ed. note: Al Daniels is currently president of the Massachusetts Association of Campground Owners—MACO. For more about the campground, contact: Normandy Farms, Dept. NEO, 72 West St., Foxboro, MA 02035; 617-543-7600).

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