

MAPPING THE LAKES

Area tradition keeps on going

Don't try convincing Kyle Hamilton that peer pressure exists only in high school. The Minneapolis resident learned firsthand how powerful the influence of a group of adults can be several years ago when he considered abandoning the famous "big, blue" residential maps of the Iowa Great Lakes region.

"After I was finished with the 1990 edition, I basically decided that I wasn't going to do the maps again because they entailed so much work," says Hamilton, who was involved with the 1980 and 1990 map editions. "But people from the area just kept on asking me to do it, so I gave in."

Ultimately, however, Hamilton has no one to blame but himself for the continuation of the tradition. "The 1990 edition of the map was Kyle's idea," says Hamilton's mother, Robin, who produced the first edition of the maps in 1960. "He didn't want to see the project die an early death. He did some sales in 1980, and he wanted to carry on the tradition."

Through Hamilton's dedicated efforts, the 1990 edition was a huge success. Still, bringing the tradition into the new century proved to be even more difficult. "I was a student in 1990, so I could work on it every day in the summer while I was up here," he says. "Now I live and work full-time in Minneapolis, so my time was limited considerably."

Compensating for limited time, Hamilton began compiling information for the maps last summer. Instead of working weekdays like he did a decade ago, Hamilton was forced to give up his weekends. "It was a sacrifice," he says. "When you make the trip down here, you want to be able to relax and enjoy the lakes area, but I had to work."

And work he did. In order to compile the data as accurately as possible, Hamilton went door-to-door trying to receive resident information. "The public records will show who owns the house, but they don't always tell who's living in it," Hamilton says. "We go to each place twice, and if we still



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can't locate the occupant, we will ask neighbors or make phone calls. Public records are our last resort."

Despite these exhaustive efforts, Hamilton admits mistakes are inevitable. "We try to do the best we can, but it is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to be perfect," he says. "We hope that people will understand."

Of course, the margin of error of the current maps is significantly greater now than it was when Hamilton's mother made the first maps on the floor of her family's cottage in the summer of 1960. In addition to adding maps for East Lake Okoboji and Big Spirit Lake in 1975 and 1980, the population of the lakes area has grown tremendously in the past 30 years. Consequently, Hamilton is dealing with a lot more information.

"It is extremely difficult to correctly identify nearly 6,000 entries," Hamilton says. "In 1960, my mother was able to use names. We now mark the residences with numbers in order to make everything fit on the maps."

Still, Hamilton is able to utilize technology that wasn't available 30 years ago. "Thanks to the computer (which was also used in 1990), these are the most accurate maps we've produced," Hamilton says.

These are also the most available maps that have ever been

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produced. For the first time ever, the maps are available for sale in a select group of area stores (Shaw Paint and Glass, Side Street Gallery and Eyes of Nature), in addition to direct mail-order delivery. The \$40 price includes a registered and numbered print and a directory matching the map numbers with the names and hometown addresses of the residents.

The cost of the maps basically covers the design, layout and printing costs of the maps and directories, and additional costs are raised through advertising; Hamilton does not receive any profit. "There is a lot of hard work and time put in by both myself and others, such as Joan Peters (who sells advertising)," he says. "But we see it as a way to give something back to the place that we love."

In retrospect, Hamilton believes his decision to print the maps once more was based upon a passionate commitment to the lakes area.

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Now that the 2000 maps are completed, the question that remains is whether or not Hamilton will work on the maps again in 2010. "I'm at the same point where I was 10 years ago, so I guess we'll just have to wait and see," Hamilton says. "But I am pretty sure that someone will carry on the tradition, regardless." □

The three residential maps list residents of East Lake Okoboji, West Lake Okoboji, Spirit Lake and Center Lake.