

First of all, I would like to thank the Borscht Belt Historical Marker Project for making this special day possible. To have a marker honoring Menges' Lakeside means so much to my brother Tom and I. My name is David Menges, and my family's story is deeply tied to the Jewish Himalayas.

Our family's history here began in the late 1800s, when our great-grandparents started the Chestnut Grove House. After a chestnut blight changed the landscape, the name was changed to Lakeside, and over the generations, our family expanded it. It evolved into a 70 room hotel on Sand Pond. Our parents, Della and Harold, were the last owners of what became Menges' Lakeside, which was sold in 1988.

I am so grateful that I got to experience the tail end of an amazing era. We were known as "the best Jewish hotel in the Catskills, run by non-Jews". Always known for its outstanding kitchen with family members being the head chef and baker throughout the generations. New York Magazine writing, "delicious Jewish Presbyterian cuisine"

In spite of having 40% of our rooms lacking private bath, no phones in the room and only two televisions on the entire property the hotel had one of the highest occupancy rates of any hotel in the Catskills for the last 15 years of existence.

Entertainment was unique. We had a resident opera company providing performances every other weekend. Mom bartered with the Bronx Opera Company for performances in exchange for rooms and meals. The same was true for our first run movies. Mom bartered with a movie distributor who lived in Swiss Forest for those. We also had 2 full-time Social Directors who planned shuffleboard tournaments, trivia contests and mahjong games. They were also compensated via room and board.

We were farm to table before it became popular with our on-site garden producing lettuce, herbs and vegetables for our kitchen.

The start and end of the Summer was always slow, so mom ingeniously contracted with Folk-Dance leaders from the NY Metro area to have Folk-Dance retreats on the weekends. They would bring their followers on Friday afternoon and have Folk-Dance sessions all weekend. I still have memories of joining in as a kid dancing to songs such as Manah Vouh.

All our staff were local. Mom hired almost exclusively from the Livingston Manor and Jeff-Youngsville districts.

The staff mostly lived on premises in the boys and girls "shack". You can imagine the shenanigans we would get in to after work. On Tuesdays, when mom left to play bridge, we would often have water balloon fights – boys against the girls. There were always pranks between the boys and girls. The girls would go drinking at Chan-Al up the road. One night someone [who may or may not be in the audience] put saran wrap on the girl's toilet bowl -- so when Loretta ran in to use the restroom after a long night

of drinking -- all you heard was her scream "damn it, who put saran wrap on the bowl".

We even had a volley ball tournament against our counterparts at Edgewood Inn. The winners got 3 cases of Jenny Cream Ale, I think the losers got 2.

And then there were the guests. It was **not** a transient clientele. Most would come year after year. One couple for 4 decades. Mostly older Jewish retired people from the City and Brooklyn. Characters like Mrs. Greenfield, would be dropped off in the Spring and stayed all summer. Quite a character. You were not a true waiter/waitress until Rose made you cry. And Mrs. Ross, who was a retired lawyer. She was part of the French Resistance and had her nose broken by the Nazis. And Mrs. Kaplinsky, who was on a barge that was about to be sunk by the Nazi's when the Allied forces rescued the barge.

Just because they were seniors didn't mean the guests weren't frisky. Mr. Stempler would arrive promptly at 8AM for breakfast 6 days a week and leave to go fishing. Mrs. Stempler would arrive at 9 looking somewhat sour -- BUT on the 7th day she would arrive perky and happy with her husband soon to follow. One morning like this the perceptive waitress presented Mrs. Stempler with two soft-cooked eggs with the inscription "freshly laid".

So many memories

So many wonderful people

Such a unique experience

Very grateful.

David Menges, October 18, 2025