

BARKER'S ISLAND INN, RESORT AND CONFERENCE CENTER

The owners of the Best Western Bridgeview Superior aren't the only professional hotel company investing in Superior as of late.

A major renovation is under way right now at the Barker's Island Inn, Resort and Conference Center as well and will be completed in early June, right as the tourist season really starts to heat up.

This property is one of three hotels held locally by the Duluth-based Oliver Companies, along with the Holiday Inn Express in Superior and the EconoLodge Duluth Airport/Miller Mall in Hermantown, Minn. Oliver Companies also has plans to build a Hampton Inn in Superior across the highway from the Perkins restaurant. In addition, the company owns hotels in Florida, Iowa and Minnesota. Its other Wisconsin hotels are located in Eau Claire, Green Bay and LaCrosse.

The Barker's Inn renovations include a newly renovated lobby, a complete overhaul of the guestrooms, pool area, patio, lounge and restaurant, plus brand-new flat screen televisions in every room. The lobby will be a major focal point of the hotel, with cozy furniture gathered around the fireplace, so guests can relax and unwind after a long day of vacation or business travel. A wine grotto is in the works and the main bathrooms have also been renovated. The property is rebranding and getting new signage as well.

According to General Manager Shannon Olson, these major investments by the Oliver Companies have invigorated the property – and the staff, too.

"We were already a beautiful place," she said. "We are on an island with walk-

ing trails and beaches. We've been somewhat a diamond in the rough for years. Our guests have always given us high scores for cleanliness and guest service. We were tired in our décor and needed a lift, though."

The investment, Olson noted, was brought on by the company's desire to invest in its community and remain competitive.

"The timing was right," she explained. "We've wanted to do this since right before the economy tanked and now the time is right. Oliver Companies is growing."

She said the renovations were carefully planned and carried out with the help of a designer.

"We want to preserve our nautical, old-world charm, but we also want to look bright and shiny and new," Olson said. "Our history is very important to us."

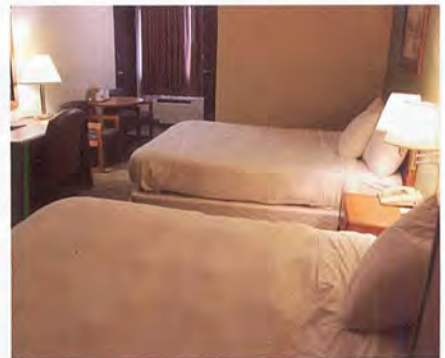
Indeed, history and folklore abound at Barker's Island. The actual island itself is named after Captain Charles S. Barker. Barker moved his tugboat and dredging company to Duluth and Superior in 1885. Legend has it that he had an ongoing feud with lumber baron Martin Pattison, who had a sweeping view of the Lake Superior bay from his mansion – Fairlawn. (Today, the mansion is part of Superior Public Museums and is a popular attraction for tourists and area residents who enjoy its many special events,

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– GENERAL MANAGER SHANNON OLSON,
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programs and tours). To avenge Pattison, Barker started dumping debris and dredge sand in the waterway in front of the mansion, with the goal of one day developing the land and blocking Pattison's view. Whether or not this feud was the reason, much of the sand dredged from the Twin Ports harbor in the 1880s and 1890s was dumped along the edge of Superior Bay, forming a large artificial island. Captain Barker was in charge of the dredging operation.

There's no doubt that the great captain himself would be proud of the not-so-sinister activity taking place on the grand, man-made island. In fact, he'd be pleased that so many people are enjoying the spectacular beauty at Barker's Island.

"That is the historical charm we want to be sure to keep," Olson noted. "To that end, we are keeping items like the lighting in the lobby, because it is significant to that time, and we are adding pieces of art that are also

in line with the history of the property and the lake."

According to Food and Beverage Manager Matt Barningham, part of the historical significance of Barker's Island also includes the cuisine in the Waterfront Grille. The restaurant is known for its fish fry, with fresh Lake Superior whitefish sourced from Bayfield, Wis. And with a new chef onboard, the focus has been to prepare meals from scratch, cut down on packaging and serve up classic comfort food, such as short ribs and stuffed meatloaf (loaded with mushrooms and cheese and topped with a rich, savory bourbon and mushroom demi-glace).

"We are using creative cooking techniques that allow us to create comfort food with a modern twist," Barningham explained.

The restaurant will also be launching a new menu with some additional offerings.

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— FOOD AND BEVERAGE MANAGER MATT BARNINGHAM, BARKER'S ISLAND INN, RESORT AND CONFERENCE CENTER



Barkers Island Inn offers the Great Lakes Conference Center with nearly 3,000 square feet of meeting space, which can accommodate up to 320 people for banquets, meetings, seminars, exhibits and wedding receptions. We also offer our Marina View Terrace for that perfect outdoor wedding ceremony – with a beautiful marina view!

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“We really do have it all here if you are having an event. You don’t need to leave the island.”


— CATERING MANAGER KIMBERLEE MITCHELL, BARKER’S ISLAND INN, RESORT AND CONFERENCE CENTER

Guests arriving at the property can relax and sip drinks in the Captain’s Quarters Lounge, or on the patio, and enjoy a free breakfast Monday through Thursday. They can also enjoy the renovated indoor pool area with hot tub and sauna, a game room, fitness center, plus very convenient harbor and marina access.

In addition to tourists and business travelers, Barker’s Island Inn, Resort and Conference Center caters to another important clientele: local residents and local businesses. Those looking to celebrate a special party, wedding or other event – or hold a business conference at this very attractive location – can book the Great Lakes Ballroom or the Erie Room. Ac-

ording to Catering Manager Kimberlee Mitchell, the rooms offer all the amenities within a one-stop-shop property.

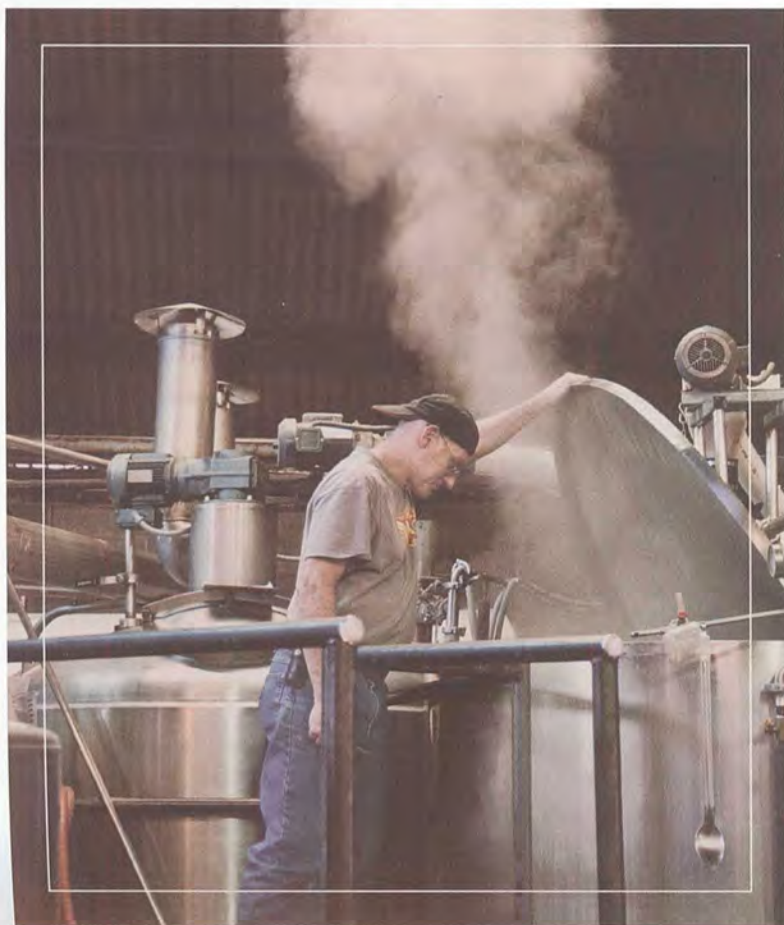
“We really do have it all here if you are having an event,” she said. “You don’t need to leave the island. You can relax here, eat here, get out and walk the trails or have access to the marina. It is a beautiful spot,

and the renovations have given new life to the property and the staff. It gives everyone confidence that we are investing and it gives employees a new lease on work life. It gives us confidence – and that flows over to our excitement for our guests.” 

Holly Kelsey-Henry is a freelance writer based in Northwestern Wisconsin.



From left: General Manager Shannon Olson, Director of Catering Kimberlee Mitchell and Food and Beverage Manager Matt Barningham.



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