

Touch of the NORTHWOODS

New lodge adds space, personality to brewery

by Eric Widholm



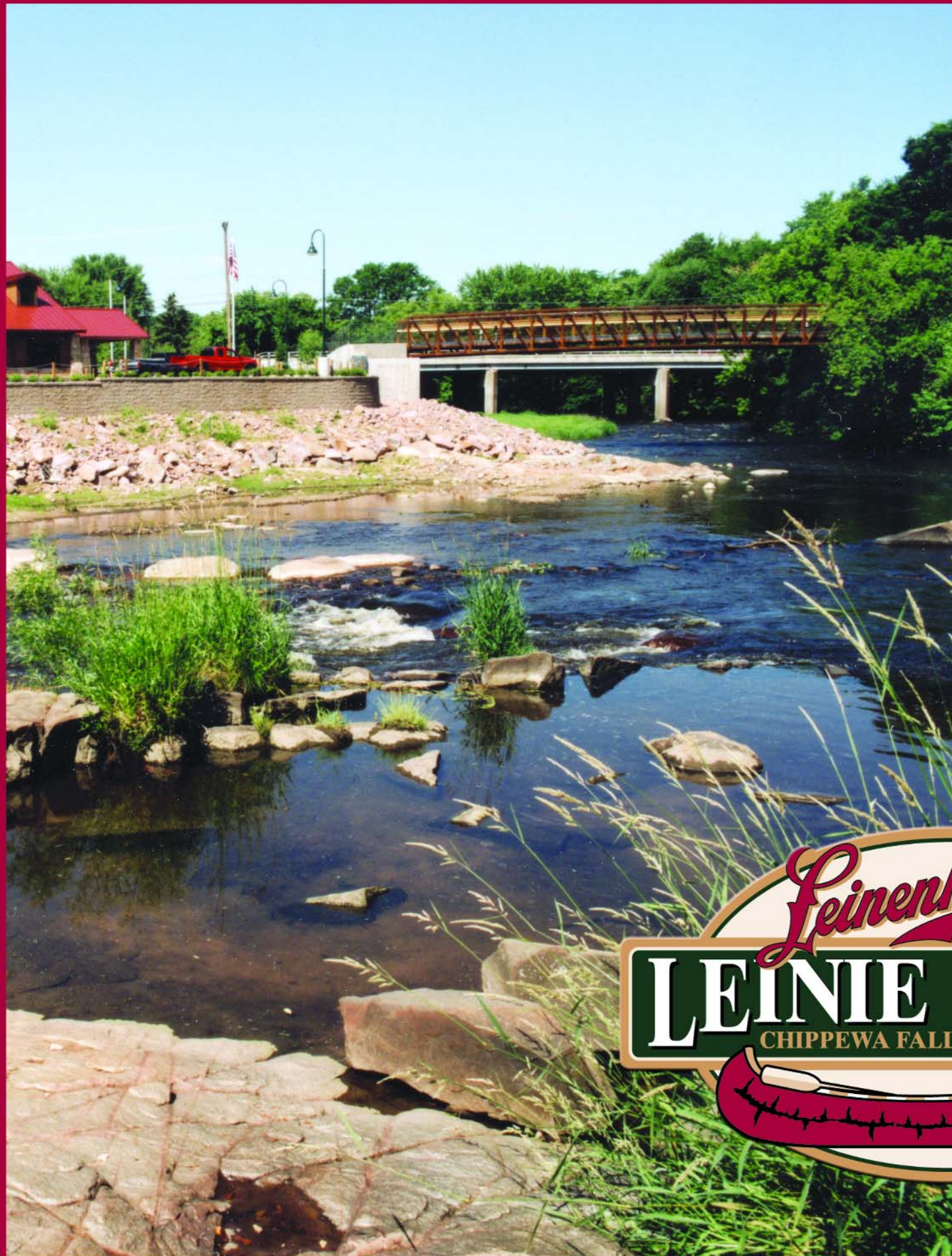
The aroma of fresh cedar greets visitors to the new Leinie Lodge in Chippewa Falls, Wisconsin, making patrons feel like they've just entered an elaborate Northwoods cottage. A few steps inside and guests enter a museum and gift shop that showcases 136 years of family brewing. Visitors have plenty of time to browse, as well as sample their favorite beers. Employees of the Jacob Leinenkugel Brewing Co. want guests to relax and enjoy themselves.

More than ten years ago, Brewery President Jake Leinenkugel began visualizing a new lodge situated on the south side of Duncan Creek in Chippewa Falls, connected to the brewery by a walking bridge. In mid-June, Leinenkugel's vision became reality with the opening of the \$2 million lodge, in the location he had planned.

The main reason the company wanted a new lodge was for space, said Mary Schnobrich, director of the



Leinie Lodge. The old lodge, which was built in the late 1970s, also didn't fit the brewery's image of high-quality beer hand-crafted in small batches.



Leinenkugel's
LEINIE LODGE
CHIPPEWA FALLS, WISCONSIN

The exterior of the old lodge, which was attached to the brewery, didn't look like a lodge, Schnobrich said. Visitors had little room inside to move around and shop, view historical items, or put their feet up. "It wasn't what people envisioned," she said. "The new lodge has the look and feel that they are expecting."

Brewery officials also wanted to move the lodge for safety reasons, Leinenkugel said. With the old lodge, patrons had to mingle in the brewery parking lot as trucks carried products to and from the brewery.

Ayres Associates began working on the lodge design in fall 2001. Construction began in October 2002 and took eight months. The 14,000-square-foot building is three times the size of the original Leinie Lodge. Ayres Associates also designed a 114-foot walking bridge that stretches across Duncan Creek, connecting the lodge with the brewery. The exterior is constructed with cedar siding, large windows, and stone, giving the lodge a true Northwoods look and feel, Leinenkugel said.

The new lodge gives Schnobrich and her staff more than three times the room to display retail items and Leinenkugel's historical items, like an old mill, horse reins, and the top of an old copper brew kettle that hangs over the bar.

The lodge has a 46-foot horseshoe-shaped sampling bar, more than double the size of the original bar. The lodge also has a large, three-sided fireplace and a covered outdoor patio, making it a great place to visit year-round.

The wood trim is forest green, and the metal roof panels are maroon—the original Leinie's colors. The interior has rustic-looking wood



A large, three-sided stone fireplace is one of the many architectural details that give the new Leinie Lodge a true Northwoods look and feel.

trusses, intricate wood columns, and large windows to give natural light.

"When they presented the original model plan to us, I said, 'That's exactly what I want.'" said Leinenkugel, one of three brothers carrying on the fifth generation of family brewing. "My concern was—as with all architectural

plans—will it truly look like that when it's done? And they did it."

The building sits on land that once held the old Woolen Mill, which the city bought and tore down years ago. The site was vacant, and much of it was in the floodplain, making it tough for prospective developers to



The new lodge has given brewery staff more than three times the room to display retail and historical items.



Above: The lodge features a 46-foot horseshoe-shaped sampling bar where visitors can sample their favorite beers.

Below: Jacob Leinenkugel Brewing Co. employees from 1888 pose for a staff photograph.



build, but Leinenkugel said he knew they could make it work. He credited the brewery's former executive vice president of operations, Pete Dawson, with getting the ball rolling. Dawson has since retired.

"I think I'm like most people who have seen it—every time I marvel at it," said Dick Leinenkugel, vice president in charge of sales and marketing. "I think it's just going to be terrific for the Chippewa Valley. It's going to be a destination place for northwest Wisconsin."

Siting the lodge wasn't easy, said Raivo Balciunas, AIA, architect and project manager from Ayres Associates. Duncan Creek's bank had to be reapportioned and stabilized with fill and riprap, and designers had to avoid nearby sewer and water lines as well as the floodplain. The site also required a retaining wall. Ayres Associates' employees from civil engineering, water resources, bridge design, and surveying played significant roles.

Because of all the site issues, Balciunas said the Leinie Lodge was one of the more complex projects he's worked on in nearly a decade at Ayres Associates. But he said it also was one of the most rewarding. "It was a fun project," Balciunas said. "It definitely had its challenges, but it allowed us to be creative and do some very interesting things visually."

"It was a major project that had its problems," said Jayson Smith, Chippewa Falls city planner. "It wasn't like going out in a nice cornfield and building something. This site presented challenges, in a sense, from start to finish."

The City helped Leinenkugel's by creating a tax incremental financing district—or TIF—for the project. The City funded costs for public improvements like demolition, site rehabilitation, and street work. The City's total investment was about \$450,000. The City helped the brewery with financing because the City eventually will get much more in annual property

taxes from the Leinie Lodge than if had the site remained vacant.

Smith said the project has many benefits. "This certainly increases tourism in the area, they are going to add more employees as a result of this, and it does add a significant amount of tax base to the city of Chippewa Falls," he said.

Jake Leinenkugel said at least 32,000 people visit and tour the brewery each year, and he expects that number to increase 15 to 20 percent with the new lodge. "I'm very optimistic for the future of the Leinie Lodge," he said. "What a great way to make people relax and make them feel like they're at the gateway to the Northwoods." ■

Editor's Note: For more information, go to www.AyresAssociates.com and click on Publications.



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