

Lake Naomi is a Credit to Poconos

Matt Birkbeck
Life in the Poconos



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For those who look at the current landscape and see a growing number of fast-food restaurants, department stores, tacky strip malls and ugly billboards, and then wonder what the heck happened here, take a ride along Route 940.

Up in Tobyhanna Township, just to the right of the traffic light in Pocono Pines, you'll find what can only be described as a land planner's dream, a Never-Never land that leaves one thinking "this is how the Poconos oughtta be."

It's Lake Naomi, a community of some 1,800 well-kept homes surrounding a 2.5-mile-long lake, which offers some of the most beautiful scenery this side of the Delaware Water Gap.

The name is not unfamiliar to most area residents. The Lake Naomi community has been around since the 1960s and the lake itself is a product of the area's logging interests in the late 1800s.

But unlike other Pocono communities like Penn Estates or Pocono Farms, what's striking about Lake Naomi is the obvious planning that went into its development. For openers, while most of the homes here are big, the majority are used as secondary homes, weekend vacation spots for city dwellers from Philadelphia and New York.

"The school district loves us because our homes have the highest assessed values, but we add no kids," said Jeff Evans, Lake Naomi's general manager. "Our focus is on vacation homes and bringing families here to escape."

And escape they do, thanks to seven strategically placed beaches around the lake, a nine-hole golf course, 18 tennis courts, and two pools. One of the pools, the largest outdoor pool in Northeast Pennsylvania, was built off the east end of the lake, offering a picture-perfect view.

Did someone say "planning"? Evans credits the late Logan Steele, the developer whose vision was influenced more by aesthetics than by greenbacks.

The result is more than impressive. It leaves one wondering, sometimes aloud, that if one community can be planned to look like this, why can't it be duplicated elsewhere in the Poconos?

Granted, not everyone can afford homes in the \$150,000 to \$600,000 range. And there are few lakes in the area as pretty as Lake Naomi.

But the obvious care and attention given to the upkeep of the community, as well as the sensitivity shown toward maintaining its natural beauty. The homes set back from both roads and the scenic lake, hidden from view. This approach can be emulated elsewhere.

But that's a tall order.

For every community like Lake Naomi that adds to the beauty and reputation of the Poconos, there are at least a dozen other sites that reduce the region to a tawdry exercise in commercial development.

For examples, look no further than behind the Dairy Queen on Route 209 in Smithfield Township, where commercial construction masquerades as a strip mine. "We like to think in terms of long-range planning," said Evans.

One can only hope that idea catches on elsewhere in the Poconos.

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