

Fox Farm

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million.

That enormous investment paid off. Dr. Green produced a modified canine distemper virus which completely freed the Fromm farms of the disease. In 1938 the scientific findings were made available to the entire fur farming industry, which was quickly put to use throughout the United States.

The success of the vaccine among foxes led to investigations of its application in dogs. That vaccine, Fromm-D, is used to this day (under a new brand name) to vaccinate dogs as well as ferrets.

The Fromm's biggest gamble was also their greatest success. In 1936 they stunned the world by hosting the world fur auction. Instead of London, Leipzig or New York, Hamburg would be a gathering place for some of the wealthiest people in the world.

Two days before the auction the worst storm of the winter struck with 15-foot snow drifts and temperatures as low as -38 degrees. Instead of turning from it buyers enjoyed trekking into the wilderness to get furs. They relished the opportunity and later referred to it as the "Fromm Resort."

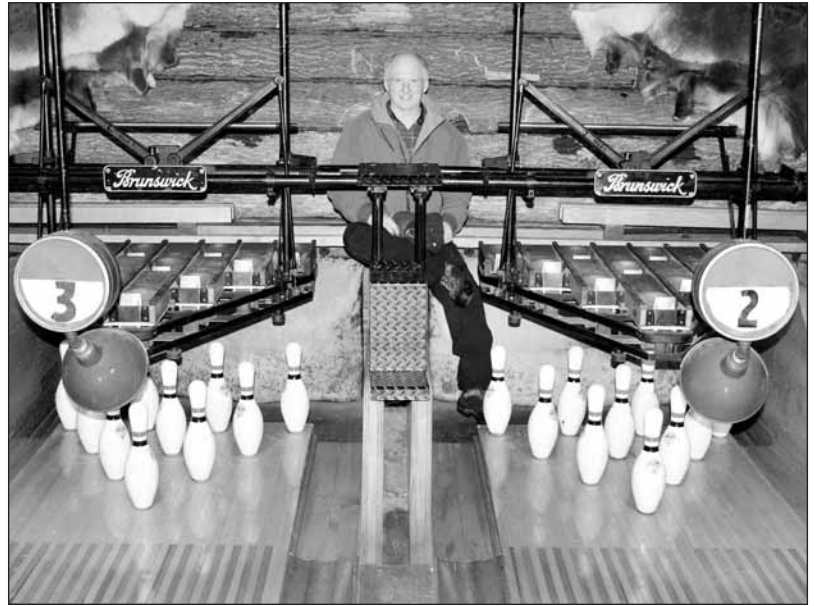
In time, Albert Einstein, Rita Hayworth, New York mayor Fiorello LaGuardia and the Vanderbilts made it to the Fromm farm. Frank Lloyd Wright wanted to design a building on the grounds but disagreed with Edward about a site and it never went up.

The grounds included two water towers — both are still standing — to help protect against fires. The Fromms even had several small sheds that housed fire-fighting equipment near the biggest buildings. Today there are more than 25 buildings on the grounds that remain from the Fromms, not including hundreds of fox houses that still adorn the grounds.

The jewel of the grounds is the clubhouse. Built in the late 1930s, it is stunning in its exquisite detail and beauty.

The clubhouse was built with hardwood logs that still have their original bark on them, though most of it is nailed on. It has two large stone fireplaces, a private bar, leather furnishings, Persian rugs and mounted animals throughout.

The most impressive features are the four vintage bowling lanes with original fixtures. They are manually operated so guests have to set pins and roll back balls



LUXURY LANES- Gary Mason, whose family now owns the Fromm fox farm, sits between two lanes in the original bowling alley in the clubhouse.

themselves.

An empire ends

In the 1960s fur was falling out of fashion, Russians were flooding the market, and its price was plummeting. With wealth came infighting and lawsuits, which split the company. Jon and Henry were on one side of a lawsuit against Walter and Ed, who won it. Walter then sold out to Ed.

Ed's youngest daughter took most of her inheritance and moved to Florida. The farm passed through another generation but didn't get very far. The Fromms' descendants tried organic agriculture and raising flowers but both enterprises failed.

As fur declined land was sold off and auctions took care of most of the rest. The last pelt from the Fromm brothers was sold in 1986 and the site was sold to another buyer shortly after that. The Masons purchased it in 1998.

The fox farm today

Today The Fox Tale and the Silver Fox Retreat hosts corporate events, including planning sessions, board meetings and training seminars. The retreat features a training room with room for 40 people, wireless internet access, an LCD projector and other modern devices.

The site is also open to family reunions, birthday parties, small weddings and other events.

Mason said groups from Aspirus Hospital, Mid-Wisconsin Bank and the Wausau Chamber of Commerce have been out there. Pommerscher Verein, a local heritage group, toured the grounds and many members even set up stations that showed what they did when they were employed by the Fromms.

As the Masons are getting situated on the property, Gary has big hopes for it. He wants to get ski and snowshoe trails around the property as well as connecting to local snowmobile trails. He cautions that having people travel around the grounds might be a bit hazardous because of the amount of rusting wire.

There are about six hours of film about the farm the Masons would like to condense and show to visitors. The website, www.foxtale.org, tells some of the story.

The property is on the state historical register and the Masons are working on getting it nationally recognized. Gary's son, Jon, is in charge of archiving the piles of magazines the Fromms were featured in, including *National Geographic* and the *Saturday Evening Post*.

Those old magazines show an empire built on foxes that is now gone. However, its story is one that Gary feels must live on.

"The younger generation doesn't know the history, and they should," he said.