



Kelch Family Celebrates 50 Years of Ownership of Pigeon Forge/Gatlinburg KOA With a May 20th Celebration

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KOA News Service (May 9, 2016) – LaVerne and Gladys Kelch loved little more than a good fishing trip to Douglas Lake. So much so, in fact, that they'd travel there fairly often from their home in Wisconsin. In 1964, after meeting Kampgrounds of America founder Dave Drum during a road trip which took them and their sons Dick and Rick through Billings, Montana, they made a decision that would forever change the lives of future generations.

"They started looking for property here (Pigeon Forge, Tennessee) with the idea of starting a campground," says Annie, the Kelch's daughter-in-law. "They bought the original property in August of 1965, and the first camper night was in June of 1966."

Annie worked at the campground while she and Dick were dating; the couple married in 1969. They eventually took over managing the property, raising son Eric and daughter Heather on the campground.

"I had new friends all the time and returning friends each year," says Eric as he recalls his childhood. "There was always someone to play with. I'd have my local school friends over here because we had a pool and playground and summer activities—and of course we had the river to play in. When we got old enough to drive a golf cart, we started working here."

After Dick passed away in 1997, Annie and Eric managed the campground while Heather attended college in Knoxville. Later, Eric managed his own real estate development company and eventually went to work for the KOA corporate office, while Heather and Annie worked together. Eric and his wife Leslie returned to the campground in 2015.

The first KOA east of the Mississippi, the Pigeon Forge/Gatlinburg KOA has certainly changed over the years. The original 10 acres has expanded over time and now includes spacious patio sites for even the largest big rigs, Deluxe Cabins with private bathrooms and kitchenettes, newly remodeled Camping Cabins and a large tent camping area. The Kelch family has worked hard to add the amenities campers want most, including not only RV storage, but also a Jumping Pillow, outdoor movie theater, a gem mining feature, meeting rooms and, most recently, Sweet Momma's Café, named in honor of Annie.

To celebrate the family's 50 years of KOA campground ownership and to thank the local community for their support over the last five decades, the Kelches are hosting an open house on Friday, May 20 from 4 p.m. to 8 pm. Live music, food and special events are planned. Those camping at the Pigeon Forge/Gatlinburg KOA Holiday that weekend will also receive a special treat—accommodation prices have been rolled back to 1966 prices.

"Mom was able to find some of the rate cards from back then, and it cost \$3 a carload to camp with us," Eric says. "So we decided that for one night (May 21) we will do the same thing. It's just \$3 to camp with us that night, whether you're in an RV or staying in one of our cabins."

Live bluegrass music, games and refreshments will be available that evening as well.

Now open year-round, the Pigeon Forge/Gatlinburg KOA Holiday is located at 3122 Veterans Boulevard in Pigeon Forge. More information is available by visiting <http://koa.com/campgrounds/pigeon-forge/> or by phoning 865-453-7903. Reservations may also be made online or by phone at 800-562-7703.

Kampgrounds of America is celebrating its 54th Anniversary in 2016. KOA was born on the banks of the Yellowstone River in Billings, Montana in 1962.

