Serenity and indulgence at Church Landing

New Hampshire hotel has it all



ROCHELLE

Businessman Rusty Mc-Lear has created a New England resort community almost from scratch, complete with four hotels of varying styles and budgets.

I say "almost from scratch" because McLear had a leg up; he built around one great natural resource: Lake Winnipesaukee, a long stretch of cold, clear water that has drawn tourists for more than

Meredith, N.H., is a former textile town that has led a double life as a vacation getaway. The main draw has always been Lake Winni, a.k.a. the Big Lake, which is wildly popular for water-skiing, jetskiing, boating, fishing and paddling, as well as the basics - sunning and swimming. Still, Meredith Bay manages to be peaceful, because power boats have to go slower than 10 km/h, so there is no buzz of surging motors.

McLear started with one restaurant in an old mill, and over the past 30 years, his fledgling enterprise has grown to a mini-empire called Mill Falls at the Lake. It embraces four hotels, plus a shopping complex called Mill Falls Marketplace, as well as Cascade Spa, which unveiled new facilities this spring. McLear even bought the local Meredith gas station and spruced it up with a cute, colourful retro look to fit into his new touristfriendly landscape.

Church Landing is the newest and most deluxe of Mill Falls' hotels. It's at the heart of Meredith, but because its guest rooms, common rooms and spa face the lake, it actually is a tranquil resort with waterfront dining and gardens along the shore.

Church Landing's accommodations are among the most sumptuous I have seen in New England, and I'm not the only one who thinks so. When it opened three years ago, Trip Advisor rated it among the most romantic hotels in the U.S. Perhaps it's the four-poster beds smothered in thick duvets, so comfort-



The deluxe rooms at Church Landing in Meredith, N.H, are decked out in Adirondack décor.

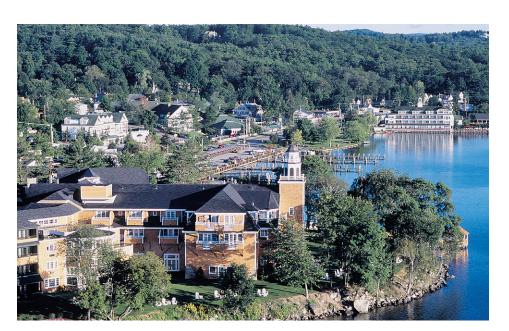
BOB MANLEY/MILL FALLS AT THE LAKE

able and heavy that staying under the covers all morning seems like the only thing to do. If and when you surface, you might plan a private afternoon, curled up in the window seat.

Church Landing's designers went all out with rusticbut-rich Adirondack-style décor (yes, the renowned New York log and birchbark style has crossed state lines into New Hampshire). The workmanship is superlative. The comforting colours of forest green, cranberry and bark recall the great forests outdoors. And McLear hasn't overlooked any indulgence. In certain rooms, a flat-screen television will rise mechanically from a cabinet with the push of a button.

To keep pace with the beautiful guest rooms, Cascade Spa has been renovated in art deco-inspired style using lots of glass and marble. It has created signature services, such as the Cascade Massage, which features body and scalp rubdowns; the Lavender-Dream body treatment, a soothing and hydrat- for the day. Laconia Harleying scrub and massage; and Davidson supplies bikes, the caviar facial, which uses equipment and maps. anti-oxidants to tighten and nourish the skin. And, again, the views of Lake Winni add a deep serenity factor.

Outside of the hotel, Mere-



Mill Falls at the Lake, built by businessman Rusty McLear, encompasses four hotels built around Meredith Bay in Meredith, N.H., on Lake Winnipesaukee.

dith simply pulses with activity. You can rent all manner of water-sports equipment and craft on Lake Winni, but one of the most appealing options in Meredith is renting a Harley-Davidson motorcycle

Lakehouse is the hotel's big, busy and friendly restaurant, also done in upscale summercamp style, with a wood-slatted ceiling, chairs fashioned walls of cedar planks.

Lakehouse perpetuates the local theme, offering fresh farm-and-sea fare from suppliers, including Portsmouth Lobster Co., New Hampshire Mushroom Company and the Sandwich Creamery.

It serves hearty American cuisine featuring appetizers with international accents such as pork tacos, pizza with ties are comfort-style bread Gorgonzola, figs and prosciutto; plus side dishes of

from branches, and twigs and rosemary-roasted potatoes and creamy polenta; and main courses of cedar-brined pork chops, braised lamb, beef tenderloin, duck breast or vegetarian peppers stuffed with tomato cream, goat cheese and mushrooms.

It's a challenge to imagine dessert after such fulsome fare, but irresistible at the same time. The chef's specialpudding and apple crisp.

For all of Church Land-

IF YOU GO

Meredith, N.H., is a threeand-a-half-hour drive from Montreal via U.S. highways 91 and 93 to Exit 23.

Mill Falls at the Lake: 800-622-6455, www.millfalls. com: The four hotels are: Church Landing and Bay Point (both lakefront) and Mill Falls and Chase House (both across the street from the lake). Each has its own restaurant serving dinner.

Church Landing at Mill Falls: 800-622-6455, www.millfalls.com; 281 Daniel Webster Highway, Meredith, N.H.

Price: Deluxe rooms and suites, approx. \$310-\$450 U.S. for two; The Birch and Boathouse suites, approx. \$470 per night for two, with pullout sofas, larger balconies, whirlpool tubs and wet bars. A two-night minimum applies on weekends. Rates include Wi-Fi, takeout coffee and muffins, two indoor-outdoor swimming pools (one is for adults), fitness centre, sauna, hot tub, lakefront and beach. Extras: canoes, kayaks, standup paddleboards.

Cascade Spa: 866-719-0161, www.millfalls.com.

Lakehouse restaurant: 603-279-5221, www.thecman.com; breakfast, lunch and dinner daily, and Sunday brunch buffet.

New Hampshire Lakes Region Tourism: 800-605-2537, www.lakesregion.org.

ing's luxuries, McLear stuck to homeland values in construction, meeting the Madein-America Challenge. This is a series broadcast by Diane Sawyer on ABC World News that encourages Americans to buy products made in the U.S.A. According to ABC, during the 1960s, roughly eight per cent of purchases in the U.S. were manufactured overseas, while today about 60 per cent come from abroad.

"We are proud to say Church Landing is 95 per cent American made," Mc-Lear said. "Everything, including the nails, the steel, the lumber and the bathtubs, are made in the U.S.A., except for some electrical panels and one elevator, which came from Canada."

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