

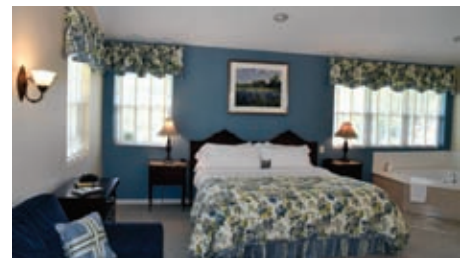
# The Galenian

Galena's official magazine | Fall/Winter 2022-23



John Walch and Jim Shopofski invite you to "Relax. Restore. Explore." at Hawk Valley Retreat. Sara Millhouse photos

## A beautiful day at Hawk Valley Retreat





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As you drive down the gravel to Hawk Valley Retreat & Cottages, you'll see three single-word signs. "Relax. Restore. Explore."

An aerated pond comes into view, then an overhanging willow tree. The cottages and inn occupy ground partway up the hill. A gazebo surrounded by flowers rises ahead of you. To the right is the lovingly restored 1905 Cording Barn, and across the valley, the land rises again, giving the property a protected feel.

"We came out, and we fell in love with the property," said innkeeper John Walch. "The area was so beautiful, the hills, the nature."

by Sara Millhouse

## FYI

Hawk Valley Retreat is located at 2752 W. Cording Rd., Galena; call 815-777-4100; or visit [hawkvalleyretreat.com](http://hawkvalleyretreat.com)

At the time, Walch was chafing at a corporate role after a career spent working independently. Fellow innkeeper Jim Shopofski faced staffing challenges in his job in managed mental health-care. "We made a decision that we wanted to work for ourselves, and a bed-and-breakfast seemed to make sense with my background in restaurants and Jim's background in food service," said Walch.

They knew the warnings. "Every book tells you not to open a bed and breakfast," Shopofski said. Nevertheless, the couple

attended a seminar and traveled 6,000 miles to visit 16 bed and breakfasts.

They took over the business in February 2020, five weeks before the world shut down. "In that short time, we got to meet people," Shopofski said. "We bonded with other innkeepers, and 30 or so of us developed a little network. We would chat in the mornings, and we just kept each other going."

During the shutdown, Walch and Shopofski redirected their considerable energies toward continued renovation, including

flooring, carpeting, painting and more.

When businesses reopened, Hawk Valley attracted guests with the property's built-in social distancing. "We have 10 acres, and we only have 14 people here," Walch said. "I think it fits a nation of people who were looking, especially during COVID but always, for the opportunity to get out in nature."

Hawk Valley includes three private rooms in the main home and four cabins. The property has been a bed and breakfast for more than 25 years, first under Jane and



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Fritz Fuchs, with Hawk Valley School of the Arts, then with owners Hal and Wendy Gilpin.

"Each couple has left their legacy," Shopofski said. "We're fortunate to have been able to spend time with each of them."

"We think of ourselves as caretakers of the property," Walch continued. "Someday, we'll be gone, and hopefully somebody else will come up with a vision of what they want to do with it."

Long before it was a bed and breakfast, the property was the center of a hard-working farm. The first log cabin was built at Hawk Valley in the 1840s. The Cording family took over the farm in the 1890s. In the 1950s, they built the home that became the inn.

This was a model, modern farmhouse, featured in magazine articles and toured by school groups. Arthur and Myrna Cording were a model farm family as well, earning several statewide awards and leading local farm conservation practices.

"As we learned more about the history of the Cording farm, we decided to embrace the farming aspect of the property, because there's such a wealth of history here," Shopofski said. "Instead of a fancy, lace doily B&B, we're more modern country."

Even in a beautiful setting, being an innkeeper isn't much more glamorous than being a model farmer. After breakfast, there's cleaning, baking, marketing, construction projects, gardening, animal care and painting to be done. "It's not a suit-and-tie job where you stand behind a desk and field phone calls and say, 'Welcome,'" Shopofski said.

"Well, you do that, too, but then you change into your cleaning clothes," Walch added.

Walch is the fourth generation of his family to work in the restaurant business. "I was born and raised in a restaurant," he said.

Sometimes Walch imagines his grandfather watching over him as he completes one of the less glamorous tasks of B&B ownership. "Here I am, grandfather, still washing dishes, 40 years into my career," he said with a laugh.

Shopofski is the animal lover of the couple. As he puts it, "I'm in charge of anything that poops." Most notably, Hawk Valley has four "big dogs with hooves," goats named Butch, Cassidy, Sundance and Etta.



Walch's father had urged them to get goats. "Your guests will love them," he said. After he passed away in December of 2020 of COVID, the couple finally got goats in his honor.

He was right, too. Guests do love the goats. Walch recalls a previously stressed solo visitor saying, "You don't realize how therapeutic this is for us."

Shopofski thinks of a vacationing firefighter "running, jumping and leaping around the garage with these goats, turning back into a 10-year-old and just having the time of his life. People just connect with them, especially when you're so stressed, and it does something for your spirit."

"For me, I know that's the highlight of my day, working with them," he continued.

Shopofski also tends bees on the property. Walch said that they seek to make the business as sustainable as possible, with 19 kilowatts of solar panels providing electricity to the property.

"We both love outdoors and gardening," Walch said. "We grow our own vegetables. We have the chickens for eggs and the bees for honey." In early summer, the garden is brimming with chives, garlic, eggplant, peppers, Swiss chard and strawberry plants.

Hawk Valley breakfasts are made completely from scratch, the innkeepers explained. "Food is my passion," Shopofski said. "It's my love language, and that's the key to everything we do here, love."

Speaking of love, Shopofski and Walch

are getting married here in December, making a full, official "Brady Bunch" with their six children. Hawk Valley has already been the location of more than two dozen weddings.

The Cording Barn hosts the inn's breakfasts and small events, with a spacious, open dining area, full kitchen and overhanging loft room. Barn flooring came from recycled farm and factory timbers, and trim came from a barn near Apple Canyon Lake.

The property includes about a mile of walking trail. The pond has catch-and-release bass and bluegill. Birding is another big draw for many guests.

"We're doing this because we want people to come here, disconnect with technology and the hustle and bustle, and reconnect with each other, or nature," Shopofski said. "When we actually see them doing that, it's better than any award you can get."

The retreat is located on Cording Road, an easy-to-miss turn off Stagecoach Road. On Cording Road, look for the sign for Hawk Valley at 2752 W. Cording Rd. GPS still sometimes mislocates the farm lane, which was changed decades ago. The change made their address appear out of order.

Especially in the winter, guests unaccustomed to driving the steep country roads of Jo Daviess County occasionally call, sounding frazzled by the journey. "Whenever we have frantic phone calls, we say, 'We just have to get them here,'" Shopofski said confidently. "We just have to get them here."