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## > Bud's landing

billiards room, an antique white refrigerated Coca-Cola cooler collects dirt in its crevices. Nearby is a makeshift kitchen, where Josephs' father used to fry Polish sausages and hot dogs and make ham sandwiches for customers. On the wall, lines and dates in black marker are records of past floods — some dating back to the 1960s.

"I just love this place," Josephs said. "I'm gonna cry. I'm going to miss it very much."

### IN THE FAMILY

Josephs' father bought the first plot on the property in July 1943.

By 1947, he had spent about \$1,000 to buy six 6-acre parcels.

Josephs said he still remembers the 18-mile drives his family took every summer from their home on the West Side Flats in St. Paul to Bud's Landing. For the 40-minute ride, he and his sisters would fight over who got to sit in the car's rumble seat.

"It was just farms and country," he said. "It was another world and we loved it."

Josephs said he was his father's "right-hand man" for maintaining the property. Some days, Josephs would cut the grass with a push lawn mower — an all-day chore.

When his father opened the beer joint, Josephs helped him serve customers, running back and forth from a "spring box" to fetch beer and pop. The spring box was a makeshift cooler in the lake, made out of logs, kept cool by a natural spring. Remnants of it remain, but the logs are beginning to drift into the lake.

Some days, his father juggled working at the beer joint at night with his day job at the Swift and Armour packing plants in South St. Paul.

Josephs said that as the years went by, he took on more responsibility.

His dad stopped operating



"I can get very emotional about this place," says Gene Josephs of his family's Spring Lake property, which is being sold to Dakota County for public use. The property includes a cabin, at left, and a "beer joint," immediately behind Josephs.



A handwritten sign on the side of the beer joint details the price and rules for renting a boat for use on Spring Lake.

the beer joint when he was 75, but he helped keep the site going for duck hunters until he was about 80.

In 1996, Josephs' father died. His mother died two years later.

Josephs and his nephew now maintain the land for their friends who hunt, some of whom have been visiting Bud's Landing with their families for generations.

Jim Deering, 64, of South St. Paul said he began hunting at Bud's Landing in the late 1950s with his grandfather. Now, he hunts there every year with his son, who is 32.

Deering hopes that one day, his grandson will hunt there, too.

"It's one of the few places that you can still enjoy waterfowl hunting," Deering said. "We weren't into harvesting numbers of birds. It was more just for the enjoyment of a place to go that's close to the Cities, where you can still get that true outdoor feeling."

Deering considers the place "history."

"It put a tear in my eye" hearing that the land was being sold, he said.

But Deering supports making the property public — as long as the county's plans won't change too much, he said. He also wants the beer joint to be preserved.

"That was an icon," he said.

### DECISION TO SELL

For Josephs, it gets harder every year to keep up the land.

"I can't do it," he said. "I'm too old."

But deciding to sell wasn't easy, he said. Dakota County first approached him a few years ago, but Josephs said he wasn't ready to let go and the \$400,000 offer wasn't enough.

"I have the most strategic spot," he said.

Al Singer, the county's land conservation manager, said the property has now been appraised for more. In 2011, the county approached Josephs again. In February, the county offered him and his family \$682,000.

The family accepted the deal.

The county has asked for about \$520,000 from a Metropolitan Council program for buying land for regional parks. The council will decide later this month whether to award the grant.

The remainder would come from the county's capital improvement funds for parks.

The sale is expected to close in July if everything is approved, Singer said.

Bud's Landing provides the safest access to Spring Lake

and its river islands, Singer said.

The existing boat launch operated by the DNR is farther downstream, he said. But the road to the launch is steep and parking is limited. When winds are heavy, treacherous currents and high waves make the area unsafe for boaters.

The county also hopes Bud's Landing will be a stop along the Mississippi River Regional Trail, a 27-mile path in the works that would stretch from South St. Paul to Hastings. The trail is expected to wind for 6 miles through the Spring Lake Park Reserve.

"This is really going to eventually provide a greater access for people to use and enjoy Spring Lake," Singer said. "It will ... change this portion of Spring Lake Park as an oppor-

Dakota County plans to buy 36 acres on Spring Lake from the Josephs family.



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tunity for a real nice picnicking area."

### MEMORIES INTACT

Josephs said his father's legacy won't be completely lost.

As part of the plans to preserve the beer joint, the county would move the building to a higher elevation, where flooding would not damage it, Singer said.

"We're trying to figure out if there's a way to preserve it," he said, "to help tell the story of the property — just be a reminder of what that area was like a long time ago."

The other buildings would be demolished.

The earliest Bud's Landing could be open to the public is 2014.

The county also asked Josephs to help with plans to turn the land into public space. The job wouldn't pay anything, Josephs said. But in return, he'll still have a key — so to speak — without having to worry about paying property taxes or keeping up the land.

"I'll just be able to love it," he said. "That's what I want to do."

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