

Better Than EVER



Sheila and Todd Lembcke, the new owners of the Red Mill, check how things are going on the opening day of the Coffee & Ice Cream Shop. It was just another work day for the couple, who – with the help of their children – have been working on rehabbing the property pretty much every day for more than a year.



Story and photography by Ron Arthur

For more than a decade, the waterwheel outside the Red Mill has been broken-down and overgrown with weeds. It's been a conspicuous symbol of the decline of the once-iconic Chain O'Lakes gift shop inside.

The waterwheel still hasn't been fixed yet. But don't let that fool you. The revitalization of the interior of this the authentic 1855 structure is virtually complete.

Late in 2013, the property was purchased by Todd and Sheila Lembcke (the owners of Sunshine Heating and Air Conditioning, located about a mile north of the Red Mill on Hwy. K). After working feverishly all winter and the following spring, the Lembcke's were able to conduct a "soft opening" last summer. The main gift shop on the ground floor of the Mill was opened for business, although not fully stocked.

Working around customers, smaller construction projects continued into the fall. Then the Red Mill and its grounds were closed this winter so that major renova-

tions could be accomplished.

This year we'll finally see the grand opening of all the public areas of this truly remarkable place.

Back in the 1800s, the sparkling waters of the Crystal River provided the power used to grind grain and corn at the mill. Most similar mills were built right next to a dam in order to most efficiently extract energy from the falling water. But here the dam was 50 yards away (because the Red Mill once shared the water flow with another mill, now long gone).

After the fall, the waters of the Crystal River roiled and twisted, sweeping out a broad "S" curve around one point, then another. They straightened out for about two hundred yards right behind the mill before resuming their circuitous ways.

The river and the Mill were once so important to this area that the residents called their village Crystal River, and the mill the Crystal River Grist Mill. [The village name was changed officially to Little Hope in 1980.]