

# ELK RAPIDS NEWS

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A geodesic dome at Silver Birch Resort.

## There's no place like dome

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CONTRIBUTING WRITER

It was at a building industry and furniture trade show seven or eight years ago that Rob Evina saw his first geodesic dome. Almost immediately, the wheels started turning in what he calls his “serial entrepreneur” mind.

“It was the shape,” he said. “Something clicked with me. It’s got this honeycomb effect, this symmetry and ambience, and I instantly connected with it. They’re cool and just so fun, and I thought ‘If we could put our furniture in those.’”

Evina had been building and selling upscale rustic furniture, cabinetry, and decor for nearly two decades through his Woodland Creek Furniture retail outlets and ecommerce websites. All he needed to turn his dome concept into reality was a business partner who could catch his vision and add construction skills to the mix. Mark Grattafiori, a licensed builder and electrician — and perhaps most importantly, a nearly lifelong friend of Evina’s — fit the bill perfectly.

“We’ve known each other since we were 15 and in the ninth grade,” Evina said. “I lassoed him into this project.”

This spring, the two are adding six more built-to-residential-standard geodesic domes to the six they constructed last spring, bringing to 12 the number of

“glamping” sites at their Silver Birch Resort.

Built with interlocking triangles that create a highly stable half-sphere, the domes are self-supporting structures able to withstand strong winds and heavy snowfall. They’re energy efficient, low maintenance, with low environmental impact. Natural light floods the dome, which reduces energy consumption and creates a congruous union between indoors and the surrounding wooded landscape.

Evina’s wife, Gina, fills each dome with a distinctive mix of Woodland Creek’s rustic and contemporary furniture and decor, accented with unique pieces from around the world and all the modern amenities to make a stay in the woods as comfortable as a five-star luxury hotel.

Built on 75 acres of pine and hardwood trees off Moore Road a mile and a half south of M-72 and surrounded on three sides by state land, Silver Birch Resort welcomed its first guests last summer. Reservations have been steady ever since. “We were booked pretty solid last year,” Evina said. “Even for the non-seasonal month of October, we exceeded our forecast. And things are looking pretty healthy for this summer.”

While authorized to build up to 40 domes on his acreage, Evina has no immediate plans to maximize his options. “I don’t think we’ll end up with that many,” he said. “We’ll take a year or two and take a deep breath and make sure demand is there.” Meanwhile, the resort will operate from April through December, giving visitors a



Silver Birch Resort is a family affair for Rob and Gina Evina and their children: Robbie, Sarah, Gillian, and (not pictured) Danielle. front row seat (and bed) to three seasons of northern Michigan’s splendor.

The joy of transforming rugged natural resources into functional elegance may be genetic in Evina’s case. He got to see it firsthand in the work of his uncles who built log homes and rustic furniture in Alaska. Although he grew up in Dearborn, Michigan, something of his uncles’ passion “must have stuck,” Evina said about his love of all things wood and creating ways to bring the outdoors indoors.

While vacationing in northern Michigan in the 1990s, Evina loved to visit the Traverse Bay Woolen Company store on US-31 in Acme. “I’d go in there and my heart would start pounding,” he said. “Their reputation was my inspiration.”

He made and sold his first rustic table in 1999. His business grew steadily and when the opportunity came in 2002 and 2003 to purchase the Traverse Bay Woolen Company property in Acme and to lease the company’s facility in Mackinaw City, Evina couldn’t resist. He moved Woodland Creek to those locations and expanded on the legacy left behind.

While Evina opted out of the Mackinaw City lease during the real estate crisis of 2008-2009, today Woodland Creek has 48 employees at three retail locations and indirectly provides employment

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A king-size bed with a view at Silver Birch Resort. Courtesy photos

Postal  
Customer

PRESORT STANDARD  
U.S. POSTAGE PAID  
ELK RAPIDS, MI  
PERMIT NO. 10

SERVING THE ELK RAPIDS ALDEN KEWADIN RAPID CITY  
EASTPORT TORCH RIVER BRIDGE WILLIAMSBURG ACME AREAS



for hundreds more at various production shops. With eighty percent of its sales now occurring online, the business is on its way toward Evina's goal of becoming the top rustic furniture manufacturer and retailer in the world.

It's not unreasonable to assume, then, that Silver Birch Resort will also meet Evina's desire to offer the most unique northern Michigan resort experience to those looking to exit the world of concrete and deadlines and enter – even if just for a day or two – the peace and tranquility of deep woods camping without sacrificing one smidgeon of comfort.

Toward that end, each private site hosts between two and six guests in a 780- or 1,200- square foot, fully outfitted dome on a large wood deck. Each unit features a full bathroom, furnished kitchenette, heat and air-conditioning, a gas grill, a fire pit with complimentary daily wood delivery, a hammock, and a highlight for many guests: an additional screened-for-privacy outdoor bathtub.



Inside a geodesic dome at Silver Birch Resort. Courtesy photos



Bunkbeds make “glamping” fun for kids at Silver Birch Resort.

As tempting as it might be to hunker down inside, guests are encouraged to get out and explore the forested acreage with its miles of trails, meandering creek, and small pond. Because the outdoors, Evina says, is what a northern Michigan getaway is all about.

“We’re three miles from the horse show, two miles from the casino, close to Traverse City, Elk Rapids, the beaches, restaurants, but still in the woods along with the deer, porcupines, fox, coyote, raccoons, and occasional bear,” he explained. “I want (our guests) to come up and detox from the city or whatever and have a unique interaction with nature, to engage the five senses with what I’ve always loved. That’s the real beauty of it.”

For more information, visit [www.silverbirchmichigan.com](http://www.silverbirchmichigan.com) and [www.woodlandcreekfurniture.com](http://www.woodlandcreekfurniture.com).