

# Take a dip in history at Symes Hotel

By **MELISSA WALTHER**  
The Daily Inter Lake

Tucked away at the foot of the mountains between Kalispell and Missoula is a piece of unique Montana history, the Symes Hot Springs Hotel and Mineral Baths.

One of the West's last surviving grand resort hotels, the Symes has maintained the look and feel of the 1940s when the hotel was completed.

Businessman Fred Symes, who built a \$50,000 Mission-style hotel on the property featuring a curvilinear roofline, quatrefoil windows and stuccoed walls, originally purchased the property in 1929.

Today, the hotel is on the National Register of Historic Places, and provides a window into the heyday of western hotels.

"It's a wonderful thing, because we're not only on the state registry, we're on the national one," said owner Leslee Smith. "It's not that old, comparatively, but it's significant to the area and to a period of history. We're one of the only remaining 'grand' hotels in the state."

As part of preserving that history, guests won't find "modern" conveniences such as televisions and phones in the rooms, though there is a phone booth and TV in the lobby.

Antique furnishings abound and there is an emphasis on old-fashioned customer service.

But that's not to say there are no improvements; the Smith family has been improving and preserving the place since they bought the resort "on a whim" in 1996.

"We were on vacation from Washington state," Leslee said. "Whenever we go on vacations, we'd always visit a hot spring, so we decided to hit all of them on the way



**THE POOL AT** the Symes Hotel is used for swimming lessons, as well as being a great place to pass away the summer day. (Photo courtesy of Leslee Smith)

back home. It was a really hot day and we saw the hotel. The owner had just put a 'for sale' sign up about three days before, so we stopped and sipped some lemonade with him. This was the biggest antique and coolest thing we'd ever seen, but it needed to be taken care of to survive. We've been working on it ever since, and we're always endeavoring to make improvements."

When the Smiths bought the resort there were no pools, no kitchen, no cabins and only 20 rooms available. Guests enjoyed the mineral-rich water in 20 claw-footed tubs, divided into men's and women's old-style bathing rooms.

"There was never a pool here until we built one" Smith said.

"We put in an upper octagon that's 12 feet in diameter and the lower pool is 20 by 20 feet with seating. We also built a pool in conjunction with the community. Kids here in Hot Springs used to be bussed to Plains for swimming lessons. Now they don't have to go anywhere."

The water from the baths comes from a geothermal

artesian well and waterfalls flow into a pool with benches for people to soak. The water flows through the two pools, going from 108 degrees to 101 degrees, and offering a perfect place to soak away the stress of the day.

The community pool has a temperature between 88 and 98 degrees.

Although the Smiths have included the new pools, they have kept some of the original soaking tubs, so visitors can get a more authentic feel for the way things were.

Visitors also can take advantage of the day spa that features Swedish massage, hot rock therapy, therapeutic jetted baths, a steam room and more.

Although the hot springs are open to day soakers, Symes is still a working resort with 31 rooms available, including a Jacuzzi suite with jetted mineral spa, 10 cabins and apartments.

"We do get a lot of repeat visitors, especially our Montana 'locals,' which I consider to be anyone within a 75-mile radius," Smith said. "We're sort of in the middle of nowhere, but we're still in

the middle of it all. People come here because we've got a lot to offer, and our water is really unique; it smells sulfurous and there is a very high mineral content. A lot of these older springs resorts were turned into sanitariums because the water contains trace minerals like lithium and they were helpful for treating all sorts of disorders."

Smith said the medical aspect of the springs is still a draw for many people, but that many people today view it as a historic and romantic getaway destination.

"Once it starts cooling off we pick up business, so winter is good for us," she said. "February is always good because we're seen as a romantic destination, and summer is actually slower."

The resort is also a social and cultural hub for Hot Springs residents, with live music and events on a weekly basis, as well as a restaurant featuring "great homemade food."

"If you like historic locations and you like to sit in the hot water, this is the place to come," Smith said. "Hot Springs' heyday was in the 1950s, but we're still a full-service town. It's really cool, because it's got all the things you want today, with all the charm of the past. It's a really authentic western town, it's just a little bit off the beaten path."

Symes Hot Springs Hotel and Mineral Baths is open seven days a week and most holidays, and is located at 209 Wall Street in Hot Springs. For more information, visit them online at [www.symeshotspings.com](http://www.symeshotspings.com) or call 406-741-2361.

Visit their Facebook page for a list of upcoming events and specials.

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# Agency looks at land deal

Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks is seeking public comments on a proposal to acquire 147 acres of land on the Flathead River about 1.5 miles south of Kalispell.

The Otter Island Conservation Area Acquisition would involve a donation of the property to the state by the Confederated Salish-Kootenai Tribes.

The land, currently referred to as the Lincoln property because of a former owner, would be named the Otter Island Fisheries Conservation area and would be managed for open space habitat and dispersed public recreation.

The draft environmental assessment is out for a 30-day public review through Oct. 9. The draft is available at Fish, Wildlife and Parks headquarters on Meridian Road in Kalispell or online at <http://fwp.mt.gov> under public notices.

## CITY

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fications and improvements;

□ Provide customer service to airport users and the flying public;

□ Provide snow removal services for the runway, apron and taxiway and mowing, haying and weed services for the airport grounds.

A five-member committee will evaluate proposals and may select up to three finalists for interviews in October. Proposals will be scored based on a number of factors, including the company's relevant experience and qualifications and proposed fees and charges.

Any airport management contract would have to be approved by the Kalispell City Council.

More information about the request for proposals is available from the city clerk at Kalispell City Hall or online at [http://kalispell.com/clerk/projects\\_open.php](http://kalispell.com/clerk/projects_open.php).

Reporter Tom Lotshaw may be reached at 758-4483 or by email at [tlotshaw@dailyinterlake.com](mailto:tlotshaw@dailyinterlake.com).

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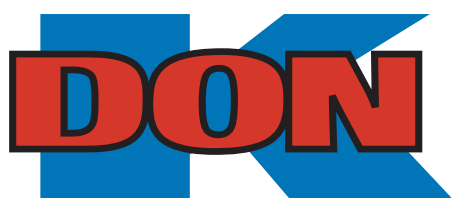
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