



The Real Story Behind Red's: Even if you thought you knew.

Michael Hamilton remembers the early days.



Fried Chicken dinners, double shots of Jack Daniels, dancing the Texas Tommy, and maybe a hot pillow? What reads like a James Lee Burke mystery is in fact the site where today stands Red's Fly Shop, Canyon River Grill, and Canyon River Ranch Lodge. Fried chicken and a full bar are still on the grill's menu, and soft pillows welcome guests to the lodge. But long gone is the prohibition-era Lattice Inn, which burned to the ground in the 1930s.



Lattice Inn 1931.

Over the next seven decades, a mom & pop hamburger joint, several tinderbox trailer parks, and the rustic Riverview Campground and RV Park, would also come to occupy the same pristine location that today encompasses the Canyon River Lodge community.

THE EARLY DAYS

I first discovered Riverview in 1992. Turning off Highway 821, I parked my truck in front of a single wide. Sitting on the porch was a spitting image of Santa Claus. The man sported a bushy white beard with a tinge of red, and wore a welcoming grin. I was about to meet Loman



Marlene & Loman "Red" Blankenship

"Red" Blankenship. "Can I get a shuttle?" I asked. "Sure," he drawled. Joining him was an auburn-haired woman who introduced herself as Marlene and quipped, "Do you need any flies?" Many folks warmly remember Red and Marlene. They welcomed thousands of campers, families, and anglers to the Yakima Canyon. But what of their story? When did they meet? Where did they get the idea for a fly shop? Where did the name "Reds" really come from? And why did they decide to sell their little patch of heaven?



THE "RED" IN REDS

Sharon "Marlene" Larsen managed Riverview after her first husband, Glen, passed away. She recently told me, "Red was an old friend of 45 years. He often came by to help out with handyman chores. We grew close and eventually married." In 1991, encouraged by fishing guides John Farrar and Bill Camp, they added a small fly shop to the front porch of the single-wide. "Red tied only one fly, the Yakima River Stone. We were always running out. I took a class and learned to tie several patterns," Sharon recalls. Word spread. Red ran shuttles and rented rafts. Business was brisk. Longtime angler Bob Ransom warmly remembers the early days, saying, "Everyone loved Red. He was the face of the business while Marlene was the backbone." I have my own memories. Floating by the campground with legendary guide Bob Aid, we'd see Red sitting beneath a cottonwood. Bob would tip his hat. Red would offer a gentle wave. When it came time to name the fly shop, Marlene explains matter of factly, "We both had red hair. That was it, plain and simple." After a long illness, Red Blankenship passed away in 2012.



PROJECT DISCOVERY

In 2001, frequent Yakima fly fishers Steve Joyce and Tony Robins asked the Blankenships if they had ever contemplated selling. "Red's health was declining," Marlene says. "We decided it was time. We trusted Tony and Steve to continue what we started, and they have." From the beginning, founding partners, Joyce, Robins, and their family friend Richard Leider, had a vision, which they named Project Discovery, after a popular line off Sage rods, to create a premier recreation destination for sportsmen, families, and friends. The plan included a fly shop, guide service, lodge, cabin sites, and a restaurant. Permitting was completed in 2007. The lodge opened in 2009. The grill first welcomed diners in July 2013. "We are very proud of what it has become," says Joyce, explaining that Canyon River Ranch is a small community with just 80 total owners (60 lodge shares and 20 cabins). "As a 1/6 lodge suite owner, I give Steve, Tony, and Richard five stars for their commitment to enhance the resource. They are true visionaries," marvels Ransom. Only eight cabin sites and 30 1/6 fractional interests in the lodge remain available for purchase. "When you start searching for recreational riverfront property,



year-round access, two-hour radius from major metropolitan areas, and with on-site amenities included, the list gets shorter and the price goes way up. That's why fractional ownership makes sense," explains Joyce.

"Fortunately, there's still a chance to own your dream," he adds. "It's pretty neat to realize that this property has been a landmark destination for nearly a century, since the early days of the Lattice Inn. Thousands of visitors each year will continue to travel the canyon and experience it for centuries to come." With no further options for expansion, Joyce says the property is now complete. "At the start, a lot of people were interested and have been waiting on the sidelines to see if this would make it through the recession," he says. "Now that it's done and we're moving towards sellout, they are coming back around."