

No limits at this getaway

Eaglewood is a family resort that is fully wheelchair accessible

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Barbara Turnbull
Living Reporter

Marilyn Oldfield was light years ahead of her time when she visualized [Eaglewood Resort](#).

It was the early 1980s and the nurse, who worked in long-term care, was often asked by families with a disabled member where they could go to enjoy the outdoors.

There was virtually no wheelchair access in southern Ontario, which Oldfield confirmed by personally touring every motel and recreational facility open for business.

"You don't even know what accessible means, do you?" she recalls asking many proprietors touting access.

So she purchased a 90-acre (36 hectare) abandoned farm in 1983 and moved there two years later, transforming it over time to what it is today: a testament to inclusion and fun.

Eaglewood is in the town of Pefferlaw, belonging to the County of Georgina. It's 75 km north of Toronto's outskirts, off Highway 48, and close to Lake Simcoe.

"I saw a need, wanted to get out of Toronto, so I put the two together and here I am," says Oldfield, 79. The site is as impressively accessible as it is natural.

At Eaglewood, there are enough activities to satisfy any group, including swimming, fishing, horseback riding and a makeshift form of miniature golf.

It's been a 27-year labour of love for Oldfield, who now uses a scooter, but is only a bit more restricted from the land she roamed on foot, establishing trails which were eventually paved.

A stocked fishing pond has a dock built to allow anyone sitting or standing to fish. "I've seen kids almost jump out of their wheelchairs when they catch a fish," Oldfield says. "Even adults are so thrilled when they catch a fish."

There's a barn with Oldfield's six horses, along with several others which are boarded there. There are two ponies, which provide kiddie rides. A large arena was built onto the barn for year-round horseback riding. Like the other buildings on site, every entrance is either flat or ramped.

"Things progressed as money (became) available," Oldfield says.

A new viewing room in the barn allows others to see the arena, and leads to a platform where people with disabilities can more easily mount the horses.

Able-bodied folks can horseback ride on trails year-round, plus cross country ski in the winter.

Sue Cathcart from Beaverton, who boards her horse, takes her lessons there and helps out with groups of kids who come to ride, says Eaglewood still amazes her. "It's just a good place to be, because it's accessible for everybody, no limits."

Paved paths wind through the property, leading to clearings where rudimentary stages are used for concerts and workshops during the annual [Eaglewood Folk Festival](#), always the last weekend in August. In its 21st year, it will be held August 27-29. As many as 400 campers and countless day visitors turn out for it.

"People bring their own chairs, picnic baskets and blankets and just hang out," says Denise Sheedy, the festival's executive director.

Outside of the festival, Oldfield books many groups, such as Boy Scouts, Girl Guides, church groups, children's birthday parties, family reunions and weddings.

Eaglewood has three two-unit cabins, each with two bedrooms, a kitchen and bathroom with roll-in shower. She had to teach the builders and argue with telephone technicians, who didn't know how to think from a wheelchair. "I think I've educated a good chunk of Georgina on accessibility," she says, with a chuckle.

There are six group-sized camping sites, one of which has a permanent tent structure for wheelchair-users who really want to rough it. It's got two single beds, but no other creature comforts.

Spend some time with Oldfield and it becomes clear that there is a good story behind every bit of development. Take the "Goofy Golf Course," for instance. Figuring every resort needs miniature golf, Oldfield applied to the municipality, but was turned down because of her zoning. So she used a series of logs and laid a course on the asphalt of a basketball court, one navigable by chair.

When Al Reeves, a frequent visitor and a quadriplegic who uses an electric wheelchair, got stuck in the mud at the furthest campsite — where an all-night jam session and bonfire is held during the folk festival — Oldfield got creative and convinced local manufacturer Dofasco to donate large rolls of the rubber used in conveyor belts, which they used to create a workable path through the rest of the site.

"Eaglewood is one of the highlights of my summer, because I leave the city for three days and get back to nature," says Reeves, who hasn't missed a festival yet.

Eaglewood isn't a fancy getaway. But it's one where every member of society is welcome to indulge in the pleasures of nature.

But don't forget to book ahead, if you want to stay overnight.

"We are not restricted to people with mobility problems at all," says Oldfield. "It's first-come, first-served, right down the line."

Reach Barbara Turnbull at bturnbull@thestar.ca or [@barbturnbull](https://twitter.com/barbturnbull) on Twitter.

There's a shimmering haze hovering over sidewalks and a yellow band of pollution layered on the horizon. Even the air is sweating. When you don't own a cottage, it's time to hit the beach. The Living section's reporters fanned out to profile the best stretches of sand within a two-hour drive of the downtown core. So unfurl your blanket, plant your parasol and enjoy the breeze.

How to get there: Take Hwy. 48 North from Toronto, continue past Sutton, through Virginia, then turn right at York Road 21 (Pefferlaw exit). Continue for 1 1/2 km. to the first right turn at Morning Glory Road. Look for Eaglewood sign 1/2 km along this road at #9715.

Price: Overnight visits range from \$36-\$51 per person, per night, for accessible cabins; \$7 per person, per night, for group camping. Day visits: \$25 per family, \$10 per person, \$150 annual family membership. Wagon rides \$30. Pony rides \$10 each. Trail rides \$40 per person.

You'll be swimming in: A chlorinated pond with a beach of sand and clay.

Signature food: Bring your own. There are two full grocery stores approx. 15 km away in the village of Sutton.

Pet policy: Pets welcome.

Diversions: Swimming pond, fishing pond, playground, covered picnic areas, horseback riding, pony rides, miniature golf, archery, 10 minutes from Lake Simcoe conservation area and big-lake fishing, cabins and campsites.

Bugs: Pefferlaw sprays for mosquitoes each spring, but they can find you in forested areas.