



# CHULA VISTA RESORT

A WISCONSIN DELLS LEGACY

*Chula Vista*  
Resort



## FAMILY & TRADITION

Chula Vista Resort is owed and managed by the Kaminski family, with 70 years in the Wisconsin Dells resort business. The resort is founded on five generations of innovation and expansion on the Upper Dells of the Wisconsin River.

2 1/2 MILES NORTH OF WISCONSIN DELLS, WIS.

## GLACIAL ORIGINS

Chula Vista Resort's story starts 19,000 years ago, when a glacier extended to within four miles east of what is now the Wisconsin Dells area. The glacier melted about 15,000 years ago, and formed Lake Wisconsin, a lake about the size of Utah's Great Salt Lake, with depths of up to 150 feet. When the last ice that held back the waters of Glacial Lake Wisconsin began to melt, the failed ice dam unleashed a catastrophic flood. The lake's depth dropped to 50 feet. The melt waters cut deep, narrow gorges and unusual rock formations into the sandstone and formed the steep-sided canyons and bluffs you see today lining the Wisconsin River. The flood most likely cut the gorges in the Dells in a matter of days or weeks as the swift water eroded away the soft sandstone.





Wisconsin Historical Society



Wisconsin Historical Society

## 1832

The history of the Ho-Chunk, the largest Native American Nation in Wisconsin Dells, once called Winnebago by French fur traders, includes immense hardship and tremendous rebuilding. In 1832, the U.S. Government began its infamous removal policy, stating that all Native Americans must be moved west of the Mississippi River. A series of deadly conflicts deeply scarred the culture. The Ho-Chunk were forced to leave their land and head to Northwestern Iowa and South-Central Minnesota. They were again moved in 1863 to a desolate reservation in South Dakota. It wasn't until 1873, when the removal policy was reversed, that the Ho-Chunk could file claims to land in the area. By then, Wisconsin Dells had already become a site for Ho-Chunk pow-wows and dancing, with tourists coming to enjoy the festivals and appreciate the culture

## 1856

The town now known as Wisconsin Dells was incorporated as "Kilbourn City" in honor of the railroad's president. The name did not stick. In 1931, it was officially changed to Wisconsin Dells, the name the locals and tourists had always used, with "Wisconsin" derived from the Native American word meaning "dark rushing waters," and "Dells" mimicking the French word "dalles" that means "layers of flat rock" to describe the bluff rock formations.

The local newspaper, the Wisconsin Mirror, offered a most accurate prophecy when it concluded in 1856 that "the wild, romantic scenery of the 'Dells' will always make them a place of resort for seekers of pleasure."



Wisconsin Historical Society

## 1873

John Cummings, a whiskey distiller from Baltimore Maryland, built his summer vacation home on the Upper Dells of the Wisconsin River, and named it Chula Vista—for its beautiful views. The family would travel to Wisconsin via train, then stage coach to the property. River Road is the old Hwy 13 where the stage coach traveled to Adams and Friendship, WI.



Wisconsin Historical Society

## 1875

H.H. Bennett opened his photography studio in downtown Kilbourn City. The studio may just be the longest running business on a main street in the country. Once you step inside and take in the incredible photographic portraits of the native Ho-Chunk people, the landscapes of the unusual sandstone bluffs, and Bennett's family photos, you'll have a new appreciation for how the Dells came to be.



Wisconsin Historical Society

**1880**

New Railroad Bridge in downtown Kilbourn City (now Wisconsin Dells)



## 1906

The Berry family built the Berry's Cold Water Canyon Hotel on the property adjacent to Chula Vista and built Berry's Cold Water Canyon Golf Course of 3 holes, Wisconsin's second oldest golf course.

## 1917

A new addition to the three-hole golf course was commissioned by Clinton Berry. The course would be on 100 acres of the Berry Hotel and include an indoor dance hall, tennis courts, cabins and a dining hall.



## 1923

The Berry family expanded to a new 9-hole golf course adjacent to the Chula Vista Hotel. Golf was taking off in the US, and Berry wanted to be the first to construct a bigger course for the area. This golf nine would be designed by Chicago Golf Commission J. C. Wilson. The course was constructed entirely from horse-drawn equipment and opened in June 1923.



## 1924

Chula Vista was also being developed at the time by John C. Cummings. Chula Vista at this time was only a few cabins, with a horse stable and fishing on the river. The new course was a hit with Chula Vista guests. The above photo is of the original Cumming house and water tower.



Chief Silvertongue at Chula Vista

## 1931

Prohibition, now in its 11th year, induces new ownership for Chula Vista. The distiller-owning Cummings family no longer wanted Chula Vista, and the property fell into bankruptcy. Enter Lester P. Daniels, manager of the Witter Hotel in Wisconsin Rapids, who takes over Chula Vista. Daniels would prove to be a very successful Dells businessman going on to operate The Black Hawk Hotel and partnering with the Consolidated Boat Company which provided scenic cruises on the Wisconsin River. He was also president of the Wisconsin Sate Lodging Association in the 1940s.

# Barber finds time for chipping in clipping schedule

By Connie Norris  
Special to the Leader-Telegram

**H**IXTON — Old golfers never die, they just keep putting. Or, as in the case of Hugh Byington of Hixton, putting and snipping.

Byington, 77, is not only an able golfer. He still practices his profession in Byington's Barber Shop on Hixton's Main Street.

Barbering and playing golf have been intertwined in his life ever since he opened his first barber shop in Hillsboro in 1932.

Golf, he said, was a popular sport back then, and a number of his customers talked about it. Since the local country club membership was an affordable \$10 a year, Byington too, decided to try it.

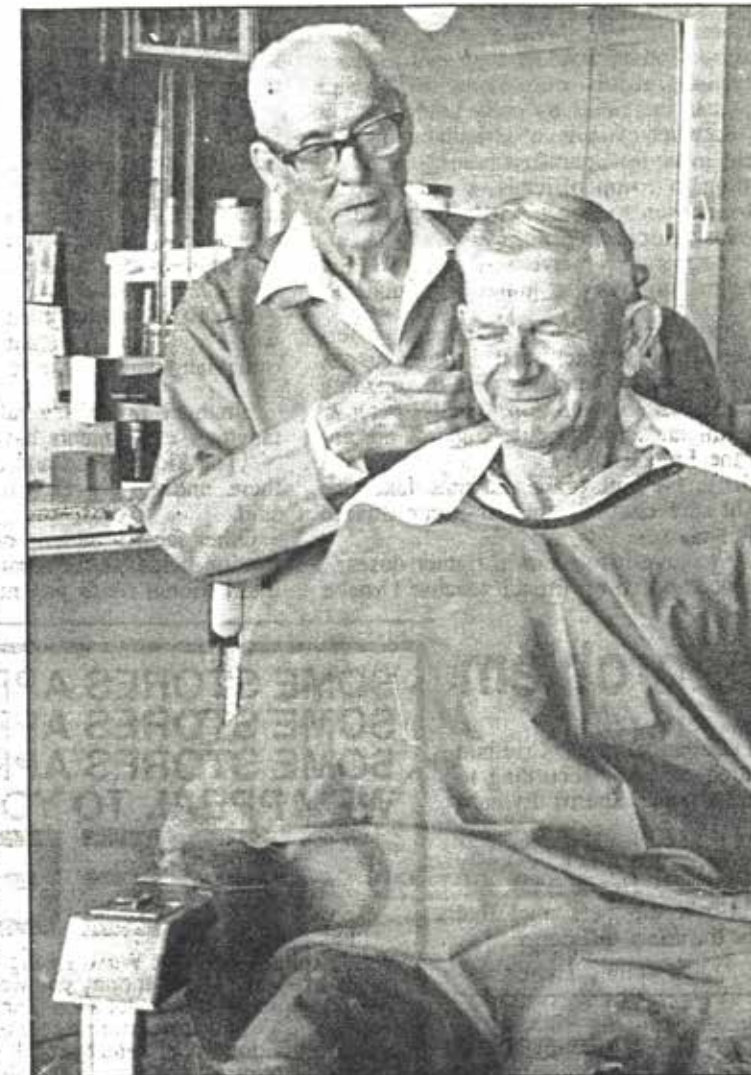
However, buying a set of golf clubs was another matter. Those were the Depression years, and Byington said he had little extra

On July 23 of that year, the 27-year-old Byington, his wife and their two children set out for a course in The Dells now known as Cold Water Canyon Golf Course. They encountered car trouble on the way. Byington found a needed part in a Reedsburg junk yard, and he and the family were on their way once more.

With adrenalin still rushing, he found his three golfing companions waiting for him on the course. Despite, or maybe because of his anxiety at arriving late, Byington played the best game of his career.

He shot a 27, six under par. It set a record at the golf course that even after nearly 50 years has yet to be broken.

Byington can still recite that Sunday's game, stroke for stroke, and keeps a copy of his foursome's scorecard close at hand in his barbershop should a passerby or customer show any interest in his



## 1939

The golf course achieves fame when a vacationing barber from Hixton, Wisconsin, Hugh Byington, shoots a miraculous 6 under par for a score of 27. Byington commented, "It seems like an easy course to play, but about the time you par the first two or three holes, it will strike back at you and knock you out. It has a way of striking back at you." To this day, the score of 27 has been recorded and it is believed that Byington's 27 is most likely the longest standing record in the history of golf.

Fast forward to July 23, 1981, Byington, at the age of 84, shoots an unbelievable 32 on the course. Copies of the score card and story are on display at the resort clubhouse.



WisconsinDucksTours.com



## 1946

Mel Flath brings the first WWII land-to-water vehicles know as DUCKS to Wisconsin Dells to create a scenic touring company. The Dells now hosts the largest collection of touring ducks in the world.

## 1947

Lester P. Daniels passes away and the Chula Vista property is repossessed by Valley Trust Company.

## 1951

Joe and Vera Kaminski become innkeepers of the Chula Vista Hotel, later purchasing the entire complex. Joe's father, Frank, joins them in the venture as the head groundskeeper. They restore the name "Chula Vista" to the property and begin the ongoing innovations that continue today. Chula Vista is the first full resort in the Wisconsin Dells area.



## 1951

A new outdoor swimming pool complete with a sundeck is built across from the main lodge building.

## 1952

Chula Vista introduces employee housing to the Dells when the Help House is built. This is a large frat house type structure with 12 rooms that can house up to 30 students, providing much needed accommodations for the college student summer workers.

## 1959

Son Fred Kaminski and his wife Judy join Joe and Vera to help run the business becoming the third generation of the family to own Chula Vista.

## 1960

Jimmy Wimmer becomes the second owner of Cold Water Canyon Golf Course, changing the name to Pineaire Golf Course. Jimmy and his family also have owned and operated Jimmy's Del-Bar a local restaurant since 1947.



*Chula Vista Resort Hotel  
Wisconsin Dells, Wis.*



HymiesRecords.com

## 1962

Chula Vista is updated with a new kitchen, a modestly sized dining room, front registration area and corporate office area.

## 1967

The Chula Vista experience is enhanced with a new spacious addition including a ballroom and cocktail lounge that accommodates 400 people. This is one of the area's first meeting and conventions sites.

## 1968

Joe Kaminski, accompanied by sons Fred and Dave, travels to Chicago to check out a new musical act, Dave Major and the Minors, for their new ballroom and night club. That night, a tremendous snowstorm hits and they are stranded in Chicago for 5 nights. Consequently, they attended the show every night, becoming fast friends with the band that ended up playing at Chula Vista every summer for more than 30 years.

## 1969–1975

The fourth generation of Kaminskis enter the scene. Fred and Judy's son Michael begins working at the resort in 1969, joining his parents, grand parents and great grandfather. Fred and Judy's three younger sons also join the staff in 1971, 1973 and 1975—four generations working together at Chula Vista. To everyone's sorrow, Great Grandpa Frank and Joe Kaminski pass away in 1975.

## 1969

Executive House lodging rooms are constructed and are regarded as the finest hotel rooms in area. These 12 rooms and a 1 suite include mini bars and half size refrigerators.

## 1970

Executive House #2. Chula Vista enjoyed so much success with the first Executive House addition, that 12 more rooms were built. The attached lock-off suit room provided 2 double beds in the main room with a king size bed in the adjoining room. At this time, all of the resort guests rooms were seasonal exterior corridor entry units.

## 1973

Entertainment is becoming big at Chula Vista. Mike, a pretty good musician at age 14, occasionally gets to play on stage with Dave Major and the Minors. And he goes on to become a music composition major with an emphasis in Jazz. He attends the University of Wisconsin—Eau Claire in 1977/78 transferring to UW Madison where he attended until 1981. Michael played with jazz greats during his college years including Richard Davis, Jim Moody, Eddie Jeffers, J.J. Johnson, Richie Cole and many others.

## 1974—1979

Chula Vista brings top entertainment to Wisconsin Dells. Bobby Vinton, Frank Sinatra Junior, Boots Randolph, Galen, and Peter Nero all perform at the resort ballroom. Many other great musical stars play the resort during the 1970 sand 1980s.

## 1978

Under Fred's leadership, Chula Vista continues to update and expand. The oldest units on the property, 20 units called the Northern Lodge, is magnificently remodeled to become the Woodland Terrace building. Chula Vista is the first hotel in Wisconsin Dells to provide in-room jacuzzis.

## 1979

The student accommodation Help House is torn down to make room for a Riverside Terrace parking lot. There are many memories from this famous party house including that of Mike Kaminski who proposed to his wife Ann while she lived there.

## 1980

Chula Vista begins building a 10,000 sq. ft. kitchen and new restaurant. Michael is finishing up his music education and decides to switch his career to the culinary arts. Mike has worked in the kitchen many summers with the Chula Vista Chef and has had the opportunity to study with Robert Hurst, the famed traveling chef from Hilton Hotels.

## 1981

Chula Vista opens up a new restaurant with expanded dining capacity and a giant fireplace to enhance dining enjoyment. The Fireside Dining Room is headed by Executive Chef Joe Holland and Executive Sous Chef Michael Kaminski. Mike marries Ann who has graduated from UW Madison with a degree in Applied Art. She has studied with famed photographer Cavallier Ketchem, an Ansel Adams disciple. The resort is one of the first Hotels to open year round and battle the seasonal image of the Dells.

## 1982

The Cold Water Canyon Golf Course having regained its original name is updated with a stunning new screened-in porch and new club house for relaxing, enjoying a cocktail and a sandwich and other 19th hole activities. Jimmy Wimmer has passed away and his son Bill is now managing the golf course.

## 1983

Mike has completed his culinary arts degree and brings expertise learned from Internationally renowned chefs to the Chula Vista kitchens. These include CES and ACF Chef Manfred Mork, who studied with Germany's Chef Weber—a student of Escoffier. Mork was executive chef for the Marriott family from 1963 to 1975, when he and his wife opened the renowned Heidelberg Fass restaurant in Chicago.

## 1984

Mike and Chef Mork are fully engaged in the ongoing development of Chula Vista Resort, their friendship, and taking culinary to the highest level not seen in the Dells before.

Mike has become fascinated by a concept—the first water park of its kind which is to be built inside of a very large metal building. This water park was to include speed slides, a wave pool, a lazy river, jacuzzi and a snack bar. The first indoor water park of its kind in the world. No bank would touch this outlandish idea, so it wasn't built. But it was a hint of things to come.

## 1985

Meeting and convention facilities expanded with 10,000 square feet of new space and movable walls for additional breakout rooms. The multi-faceted basement of the new conference center boasted a 12,000 sq. ft. Indoor pool with a water side, a hot tub, a game room and bar, a fitness center with steam room, sauna, workout room and a giant Solarium with view of the Wisconsin River and tall Norway and White Pines along the water. It was the first indoor waterpark of its kind in the world but all of the rooms were still outdoor corridors.

## 1988

The Riverside Terrace that was now 10 years old was in need of a PIP (Property Improvement Plan). Mike enlisted the help of the Bank of Wisconsin Dells. The loan officer John Bernander helped Mike for this \$300,000 project which included remodeling, painting, new carpeting, new case goods, and mini fridges for 24 units. Over 30 years later, Chula Vista still works with now president John Bernander at the same bank.



## 1992-1993

Chula Vista adds Adventure Lagoon, a 50,000 sq. ft. outdoor waterpark featuring an elaborate swimming pool with three waterpark-style water slides. Also added are a snack bar, an outdoor whirlpool, a new kiddie pool with a Coyote water slide and lots of new deck space accommodating 200 lounge chairs, all on the site formerly occupied by a pool that had been built back in the early 1950s.

## 1993

Chula Vista incorporates the Andover Building Management System. This system manages Fresh Air 100% intake, heat recover systems, room temperatures, lighting, CCTV camera's etc. for the building. As the resort grows, this building management system includes the indoor waterpark and all other public areas of the resort. This was never more important than during the Covid-19 pandemic of 2020.



## 1997

Chula Vista builds 63 new guest rooms on top of the North Tower that was constructed in 1991 bringing the guest room count to 220 guest rooms and suites.

## 1998

A new \$1.2 million lobby is constructed with accompanying office suite and 2 additional meeting rooms. The new feature creates a grand new look and feel for this historic resort.



## 1999

Bill Wimmer, who then owned the Cold Water Canyon Golf Course, completes an extensive update including a new clubhouse and an additional nine links style holes, bringing the historic course up to 18 holes. A new, improved irrigation system is also installed.

Chula Vista expands, building the new South Tower which boasted 3 meeting rooms, 98 guest rooms, a 4,000 sq. ft. gift shop, additional office space and a new main entry and entry canopy. Now the hotel rooms totaled more than 300 including suites.



## 2000

The Kaminski family's 50th anniversary of Chula Vista ownership inspired Mike and brother Tim to create a 1950s-style musical review with the local swing choir. Their plan was to run a 2-hour performance, a total of 50 shows that season to celebrate the anniversary. The show ran for the next six seasons—100 shows per season. For two years it was the main entertainment for the New Year's celebration. Titled the Fab 50s Show, it rivaled some of the best Branson, MO had to offer. For many of the shows, Mike and his children, Jeff and Krissy, made up the horn section



## 2003

The outdoor waterpark adds new experiences. An extreme water slide, a new 18 hole mini golf course with water features, a pavilion to serve groups and expand the fun at Chula Vista. A new waterpark entry with a shower, bath house room and ticketing area enable the waterpark to be now open to the public.



## 2000

In April, Mike and some partners purchase Cold Water Canyon Golf Course from the Wimmer family, therefore preventing a sale of the course via auction. The Kaminskis welcomed the opportunity to add golf to the Chula Vista experience.

## 2004

Big Moe's restaurant opens at the golf course club house and soon develops a reputation for a great Friday night fish fry and a sumptuous Saturday night prime rib dinner.

## 2004

Mike initiates the planning and development of a \$200 million expansion that adds 400 condominiums to the resort. It starts with an ambitious 2-year project to bring city of Wisconsin Dells water, sewer and utilities 6 miles north to the resort. Once Chula Vista got the green light on the utilities, the rest of plan fell into place. New streets would connect the golf course and other sections of the resort. Chula Vista Parkway was to carve a scenic route through the golf course to Highway 13 where a new main entry would welcome guests with vastly improved curb appeal. All of the outdoor corridor units were developed into staff housing on a new site just a few hundred years from the main resort. All of the guest units would now be indoor corridor unit access.



## 2005

Included in the golf course aspect of the huge new building project, a new 10,000 sq. ft. outdoor reception area was constructed. The first of its kind in the Wisconsin Dells area it included a wedding venue and a 6,000 sq. ft. 3 season tented facility for receptions and golf events. A new driving range was built and the golf course itself received a complete update.

Using 30,000 dump truck loads of earth from the new condo construction to provide materials for a complete revamping of many of the fairways.

The golf course took on an entirely new feel with tall moguls, raised tee boxes and strategic plantings so that each fairway was a private golfing experience.

The innovations continue with the building of 182 new 2 and 3 bedroom condominiums. First the now aging Riverside Terrace is gutted, cut in half, picked up and moved to a new site on the golf course to be reconstructed into Golf Villa condominiums which will be for sale. Construction then begins on the new Rio condominiums on the old Riverside Terrace site. The Golf Villa condos are open for occupancy in May of 2005.



## 2006

The new multi-level Los Rios Indoor Waterpark opens on July 1, 2006. This \$25 million, 80,000 sq. ft. playground is the first multi-level indoor waterpark in the world. It boasts a new game room, Crash Landings restaurant, and Luigi's Pizzeria in addition to all the water fun. An incredible underground corridor connects with the resort's hotel rooms, condos and the South Tower to provide indoor access during the winter months.

## 2006

Phase 1 of the Rio Condominiums opens with 120 of the planned 182 units completed for the 4th of July weekend. This huge new development includes meeting space, a new Grand Ballroom, a new river walk, new outdoor wave pool, new kiddie river, new sport pool, new shuffle board, new sand volleyball court and an outdoor restaurant named Margaritas.



## 2006

The family opens Kaminski's Chop House, a very early provider of fine dining in a resort atmosphere. It's instant recognition as a one of the nation's great steak houses continues today with Kaminski's Chop House being awarded Trip Advisors Certificate of Excellence for 5 consecutive years.



## 2006

Before this year was over, Chula Vista had sold and closed on \$84 million in condominiums; added 26,000 sq. ft. of convention space, opened the Hot Springs outdoor hot tub on the river front and remodeled and enlarged the Spa Del Sol and Pink Nail Bar.



## 2007

The Wisconsin Dells Center is built just down the road from Chula Vista Resort. This 100,000 sq. ft. domed athletic facility with 1100 parking stalls brings year around athletic events to the area adding another element to the visitor base. Also in 2007, phase 2 of 60 new Rio Condominiums opened and the Riverwalk was completed.

## 2008

Opening of phase 3 of the Golf Villa Condominiums.



## 2013

The golf course club house along with Big Moe's restaurant burn to the ground on February 28. In April the golf season begins with a triple-wide trailer serving as the temporary clubhouse while the new building is under construction.

## 2014

The brand new 11,000 sq. ft. clubhouse that features a new restaurant and bar, pro shop and kitchen for the The New Tavern Restaurant, opens in May.



## 2020

The Screaming Eagle Zipline Park is completed providing an aerial adventure while viewing the beauty of water-carved canyons and picturesque rock formations.

## 2020

Chula Vista purchases a Wyndham franchise and becomes the first indoor waterpark hotel in the Wyndham Trademark Collection Family. This award-winning loyalty program also brings peace of mind to booking a stay backed by the world's largest hotel company of 9200 hotels.

## 2021

Chula Vista introduces two new thrill attractions. The Ultimate Rush is a giant 15 story high bungee ejection pallet that launches you high in the sky and bounces you back to earth again. Our new Superman style Screaming Eagle dual racing zip line adventure is only one of 3 in the United States.



