

Retreat will offer families a getaway from modern life

By ERIN SCHATTAUER



Photo by Jerry Sowden - Jerry Schill, standing inside the main barn on the 105-acre farm he recently purchased near Fryburg, wants families to reconnect to each other by learning simple chores and doing without some modern amenities.

Jerry Schill admits it doesn't sound like the typical vacation - climbing out of bed at the crack of dawn to milk the cows and tend the garden. But it isn't meant to be a typical vacation.

After spending the last 18 years in North Carolina, former Marble resident Schill, who has served as president of the North Carolina Fisheries Association in New Bern, and his wife, Pam, originally of Tylersburg, are returning to the area where they grew up to establish a religious retreat.

The retreat will be located on a 105-acre farm just past Fryburg that was formerly owned by an Amish family. The Joshua Christian Family Center, named for the Bible passage Joshua 24:15, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord," will offer families a getaway from modern life.

The center will have running water and electricity, Jerry Schill assured, but instead of children playing video games all day while their parents bask in the sun, families will wake up early, help with farm chores and enjoy doing simple tasks together as a family.

"It's not meant to be an Amish experience. It's supposed to be a family experience," Schill said. The idea is to give families a place to go to get away from the daily hustle and bustle and reconnect through simple activities. They will learn to milk cows, collect eggs and tend to a garden. Everyone will help with the chores.

"This is a great place to learn humility...It's a great place to learn teamwork," he said.

There's more to the center than farm chores. The center's location allows for day trips to places like Cook Forest, Drake Well and other tourist attractions, Schill said.

"We want to utilize what's already here, what people may want to see while they're here," he said. The Schills plan to hire a farm manager and house manager. Plans for Bible studies are also in the works.

There's still a lot of work to do, mostly to the house, which has no running water, except for a single spout in the step-down kitchen where a gravity pump feeds spring water into the house. Bathrooms must be installed since there aren't any in the house now (the old tenants used an outhouse).

Many of the upstairs walls are just bare drywall. In other rooms aged wallpaper is faded from time. The Schills know there is a lot of work to be done, but they're ready for the challenge.

"I'm excited about the challenge, moving back to our roots in northwest Pennsylvania and being around family," Pam Schill said.

When the farmhouse is renovated and fitted with a septic system, running water and electricity for the families, the Schills plan to have a log cabin erected on the property where they will live.

Not only will the Joshua Christian Center be open to families, but Schill hopes school groups and corporations will also make the trip to the farm to hold trips and retreats.

Although it will be a Christian retreat, it is non-denominational and anyone will be welcome.

The Schills are also planning to offer free stays for military families.

They will work over the summer and autumn months to have the center open for the holiday season. The first family Jerry plans to have stay at the farm when it is finished is his own.