



# The Buffalo Are Back

## Tourist destination brings new life to Waukomis, Oklahoma

< [OKLAHOMA STORIES](#) | September 2021 | Elaine Warner



A life-sized buffalo sculpture and water feature greet guests at Buffalo Point. **Photo by Elaine Warner**

According to the Kansas state song, the buffalo roamed on the plains. They also wandered into Oklahoma and wallowed near Waukomis. A thriving little community in the '50s, Waukomis had two grocery stores, three car dealerships and a local Lions Club with membership of around 50. But time and the economy were not kind, and for many years Waukomis has been bypassed by progress and by traffic zipping up and down U.S. 81. Today, visitors are getting off the highway to see what's happening to the town.

The buffalo are back—just not the way you expect. A block of buildings, Buffalo Junction, now replaces abandoned businesses. And, a few blocks off of Main Street, Buffalo Point is an elegant retreat accommodation and event center that is bringing new life to the community.

## **Giving back**

The new additions happened because of Mo and Richard Anderson, who grew up in the area and are graduates of Waukomis High School. Both have led very successful lives and wanted to see their hometown as vibrant as it had been when they were young.

Gene Anderson, Richard's cousin, says the Anderson's roots were deep in Garfield County—going back to Richard's Swedish immigrant grandfather Frederick.

"He arrived with 50 cents in his pocket," Gene says. "After making the Run in Kingfisher County in 1889, he later moved north, close to his brother, who claimed land in the Run of '93."

Frederick and his wife had six children. At the end of his life, he left each of them 240 acres.

When the Andersons decided to build a family retreat, they chose Waukomis.

"Richard wanted a modest little house, a few acres and a chicken house. And then he got our interior designer and me involved and it turned into this," Mo says.

"This" is a gracious home with everything a family or guest could want.

"For years we would come here with the family and have events in the barn," she says.

The Amish-built structure now serves as heart of the retreat and is often the site of wedding receptions, large community events and meetings. Looking ahead, as their children and grandchildren moved on with their lives, the Andersons considered the possibility of future owners turning the property into a bed and breakfast. However, the place just grew. Amenities include a swimming pool and spa, a gazebo, a vineyard, a garden and green house, lovingly landscaped grounds and even a chicken house. They added another house and a large office-garage with an upstairs accommodation. The entire property is now available for events, retreats or a luxurious getaway.



*Buffalo Junction's new businesses bring excitement to Waukomis. | Photo by Meggan Whitsitt*

When the opportunity arose, Richard and Gene began acquiring property downtown. They started with a corner lot, now home to Waukomis' Pioneer Memorial Park. They began gradually buying up individual pieces, and by 2016, they owned a quarter of the town's Main Street.

The century-old buildings had deteriorated past renovation and were removed. In their place now is Buffalo Junction. The block includes Mo's Café, a place for the community to eat and gather. The gift shop, The Painted Buffalo, carries Made in Oklahoma items, gourmet foods—including wine jelly from the Buffalo Point vineyard—books, home décor, apparel and more. Shorty's Barber Shop, on the site where both Mo and Richard's dads got haircuts, is now a by-appointment barber shop and hair salon. (If the barber pole is on, Booker the Barber is in and will take walk-ins.) The Chapel of Joy, accommodating 100 guests, provides the perfect venue for a small wedding. It can be set up for other types of events like sit-down dinners as well. Buffalo Junction Apartments, two-bedroom, two-bathroom luxury spaces, are currently fully occupied.

## **A team effort**

Both Richard and Mo have been successful in real estate and development, but Mo's career path is particularly unusual. The daughter of a tenant farmer, she worked from an early age. She started at the local grain elevator in high school and worked her way through college, receiving a degree in elementary education.

"When I was young I made up my mind that when I grew up I was going to make more money than I needed because I was sick to death of being poor," she recalls. "I knew if I had extra money I could do things for people. As a kid I never got to buy my parents a gift or my friends a birthday present."

Mo taught school for 14 years, but she realized her teacher's salary wasn't going to help realize her dream. Richard surprised her one day by telling her he had enrolled her in a real estate course. She passed the course, got her broker's license and began working. She eventually became the CEO of Keller Williams, an international firm, and is now one of the co-owners.

Mo discovered she has a talent for creating a successful business culture. A past guest lecturer to MBA students at Yale, she would tell skeptical students, "Look for like-minded people. We're not all the same color, have different religions, different backgrounds, different political beliefs. But we all agree that your faith, whatever it is, and your family come first and the business is second."

The Andersons are aided in Waukomis by an excellent team. Gene Anderson is the general manager, the vintner and winemaker. Doug and Gwen Pethoud are the Buffalo Point hosts. With Gwen's experience as hostess and chef on luxury yachts, guests can expect a gourmet breakfast. Lots of locals help manage and work in Buffalo Junction.

Together, they're bringing the community back to life and creating a unique destination for Oklahoma. **OK!**