

Bianca and Robert  
Wiegand with daughter  
Wendy, and Bill Frantz



# The Great OUTDOORS

**NOVELTY-BASED WIEGAND'S LAKE PARK HAS EVOLVED OVER 75 YEARS FROM A FAMILY RETREAT TO A CORPORATE MEETING VENUE.**

By Kristen Hampshire

Seasonal business requires perennial T.L.C., because no matter how you divide the days in a calendar year, there are only 52 weekends, and just 26 of which Wiegand's Lake Park in Novelty opens its grounds to customers.

"When I was little, I always thought we had the winters off," says Wendy Wiegand, the third-generation owner of Wiegand's 104-acre "picnic grove," which has evolved from a family retreat to a corporate meeting venue in its 75 years of operation. Wiegand took over the business in 1987, and learned quickly that winters are crunch time — time for building projects, planning menus and booking events.

Starting in May, corporate clients like Eaton Corp. and University Hospitals book the park to hold company picnics, off-site meetings and team-building activities.

"Our business model is to only take one group at a time," Wiegand explains. "When you start being an amusement park where there are different groups in the park and the public is there, you don't get special attention and you

don't see people from your group."

Groups like the fact that their organizations have free rein on the park, its spring-fed lake and softball diamond.

"Employees will have a breakfast meeting, then we'll stuff them with lunch and they'll play the rest of the day," says Wiegand, noting food as a main event at the park. She cooks favorites like oven-fried chicken and homemade potato salad herself "and you can tell," she says.

Though the park's days of 25-cents-per-carload business are long over, Wiegand stays true to the family mission of delivering quality service, while seeking ways to adapt the business to today's demands. Some customers have come back for 40 consecutive years. Her secret: "As service dwindles elsewhere, be the breath of fresh air," she advises. "Learn about your audience. Listen to their needs and requests."

In doing so, the park's menu has evolved and expanded and more executive groups book meetings, which require more services of Wiegand's staff.

"We see that people like more things done for them than in the old days," she says. "Before, they had employees run the games, and now they are willing to pay for more services."

To grow the business, Wiegand books more weekday meetings and she keeps in touch with customers over the winter via e-mail. "Our Web site levels the playing field and brings us right to the desktop of the picnic planner," she says.

Most of all, Wiegand must keep an eye on the budget, just as the generations before her did.

"In a small, closely held business, do your own work as much as possible," she says. "And as the boss, be willing to work the hardest and the cheapest."

The payoff: a back yard that is 104-acres large and a lifestyle she wouldn't trade for a white collar any day.

"Our employees usually have newer cars and clothes than we do," Wiegand says. "But we have the satisfaction of a 75-year-old job well done." ❦

Want to join IB's Birthday Club? Contact Senior Editor Morgan Lewis Jr. at (216) 377-3686 or [lewis@inside-business.com](mailto:lewis@inside-business.com).