



# THE ‘POWER OF AND’

How four generations are building community and business success in northern Michigan

There are many successful businesses in northern Michigan that are strongly committed to doing good for the community and the environment.

One family in Benzie County – representing two unique businesses and four generations – is a great example of how doing good for the community and doing good for business aren’t just compatible, but are mutually reinforcing. They demonstrate the “Power of And.”

Watervale Inn is a historic, family-owned summer resort on the shores of Lower Herring Lake and Lake Michigan that has been welcoming guests for 108 years. The Kraft/Noble family is the ownership family; Jennie Turner Schmitt, a fourth-generation member, is the current operator.

Stormcloud Brewing Company, founded by Jennie’s husband Rick Schmitt has been serving Belgian-inspired craft beer since 2013 in downtown Frankfort. Together, Rick and Jennie have impacted our small corner of northern Michigan.

## The gift of Watervale

For more than a century, Watervale Inn has been a destination for exceptional hospitality, and it holds a special place in my heart. As a child, Watervale’s beaches were part of my summer playground. More recently, we celebrated Mother’s Day dinners with our moms, who loved every detail – fresh spring flower arrangements on each table, starched tablecloths and napkins, delicious cuisine and connecting with dear friends. My sister exchanged wedding vows on the deck overlooking Lower Herring Lake.

We also have a special connection with Stormcloud Brewing Co. Rick Schmitt joined Crystal Mountain as our director

of sales and then vice president of sales and marketing in 1995, relocating from Denver with his wife, Jennie Turner Schmitt. This move also helped Watervale transition to the next generation of family-operated leadership, with Jennie becoming general manager.

It all began in 1916 when Dr. Oscar H. Kraft, a Chicago ophthalmologist, purchased the abandoned lumber town of Watervale, established in 1892. His vision was to create an idyllic summer place for family and friends, but in 1917 he opened it as a resort.

In 1960, Dr. Kraft sold the resort to his niece Vera Noble and her husband Vern. They ran it until the early 1980s when they transferred ownership to their children with their daughter, Dori Noble Turner, taking over as the innkeeper.

Not only did Dori carry on Watervale’s tradition of simple elegance and exceptional hospitality, but also the “Power of And.” Dori led the family’s decision to permanently protect more than a mile of beautiful Lake Michigan shoreline with a conservation easement to the Grand Traverse Regional Land Conservancy.

This huge gift was key to the Conservancy’s acquisition of 2,800 acres bordering Watervale, now the Arcadia Dunes C.S. Mott Nature Preserve. This preserve not only enhanced Watervale’s guest experience but also provided public access to a spectacular natural area with trails, Lake Michigan beaches and stunning views. The family then helped to protect another 420 acres and nearly four miles of shoreline across the Upper Herring Lake and Green Point Dunes Nature Preserves.

In 2003, Jennie, alongside her mother, carried on the family legacy of steward-

ship, placing an historic conservation easement on the original Victorian-era buildings to ensure that the resort’s timeless character would be preserved in perpetuity.

Authenticity of place, a mecca for outdoor recreation and gracious hospitality are all reasons why Watervale guests return year after year, for generations. But Glen Chown, CEO of the Grand Traverse Regional Land Conservancy adds another reason.

“It’s a feeling of being part of a community that cares for the people and the places that make its success possible, and where benefits are shared,” he said.

## Stormcloud rolls in

In 2012, Rick left Crystal Mountain to start Stormcloud with his partner Brian Confer. We were sad to lose a valued leader, but we knew this business would incorporate the “Power of And,” contributing to the common good and growing a sustainable business.

Stormcloud quickly became a regional favorite, earning recognition as Best New Brewery in Michigan by the MLive Media Group within three years. It brought 75 new jobs to Frankfort and new life to the city as a year-round gathering place for neighbors and visitors, with activities like curling, bocce ball, Trivia Night and community partnership such as “Keep Benzie Beautiful - Lakeshore Cleanup.”

In 2017 Stormcloud added a second facility, increasing its brewing capacity and employee base, and it included many eco-friendly features, such as onsite solar arrays, energy-efficient heating and cooling, and a waste reduction process that sends spent grain to local farmers for livestock feed.

## The “Power of And” in action

Beyond the brewery, Rick’s contributions to the common good are worth noting. He and Jennie, along with Marci and Blake Brooks, saved the historic Garden Theater from demolition in 2008. The theater, a community anchor since 1924, had fallen into disrepair in early 2000. If it wasn’t for believing in the “Power of And” and creating the Friends of the Garden Theater, the space wouldn’t be the vibrant hub it is today with movies, music, concerts, community fundraisers, irresistible popcorn and the Frankfort Film Festival.

Rick and Jennie are both civic leaders. Rick served as president of Frankfort Elberta Schools for 12 years and is the current chair of Frankfort’s Downtown Development Authority. Jennie is the president of the Benzie Shores District Library and serves on the Board of Michigan Legacy Art Park, which is close to our hearts at Crystal Mountain.

Enterprises like Watervale Resort and Stormcloud Brewing Company, led by people like Rick and Jennie Schmitt, prove the enduring “Power of And.” By deeply integrating business success with community stewardship and environmental protection, this four-generation family shows that prosperity and purpose are mutually reinforcing. This is the kind of commitment we need for northern Michigan to remain both beautiful and prosperous, now and in the future.

*Chris MacInnes is president of Crystal Mountain. In 1985, she and her husband Jim moved from California to join this business and together have led its evolution. She is also active in state, local and industry organizations.*

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