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Whitewater couple packs fun into dream house

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By Marcia Nelesen
Gazette Staff

WHITEWATER LAKE-Dorothy Byrne chose glacial white as the color scheme for her new dwelling.

Then again, it's hard to fight ice walls, ceiling and floor.

One advantage? When guests spill their hot chocolate, the hostess can simply shovel the mess outside.

"It's easy to dust," Dorothy said, bundled up and sitting on a camp chair in her newly minted igloo at W7845 Crestview Drive.

That's the igloo's address, not hers.

It was party time late last week, the day after Dorothy, 81, and friends put the finishing touches on her ice castle.



David Byrne crawls out of the igloo he and his wife, Dorothy, built next to their home near Whitewater Lake.

Al Hoch/Gazette Staff

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chairs scattered about the domed living room. But one had to cool her backside by the entrance.

The temperature outside the igloo was about 10 degrees. Inside, one guest estimated it was a toasty 40, what with the heat from the adult bodies and a lit candle.

"I always wanted an igloo," Dorothy said. "I made caves in the snow and tried to sleep with my kids in the snow."

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Dorothy ordered an igloo kit over the Internet from a Colorado company called Icebox. The kit is simply a box mold connected to a rod connected to a pivot. The pivot is put in the center of what will become the igloo floor.



David and Dorothy Byrne share a tender moment in the igloo they built near their Whitewater Lake home.
Al Hoch/Gazette Staff

The group made a try at an igloo a couple of weeks ago, setting up house in a hollow near the Byrnes' home on Woodchuck Alley. Friend Joe Sherman and Dorothy did most of the work. Joe shoveled snow into the mold as Dorothy packed.

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When a ring of snow bricks was completed, they raised the rod, changed the angle of the box and bricked the next level. Snow was sometimes used as mortar.

When they neared the top, Dorothy balanced the molding box on her head as Joe pounded it into the lower wall.

"I'm going to have such a whiplash," she thought.

"Building this is very physical," Joe said. "It is extremely exhausting."

The entryway was the only part not finished when the rains hit.

Dave and Joe covered the igloo with a tarp, but the temperature kept rising. When the weather let up, they crested the hill only to find that the igloo had collapsed.

They were devastated but not deterred. The group started up again after the last blast of cold and snow, laboring for a total of about 10 to 11 hours. The workers sometimes sprinkled water to increase the packing power of the powdery snow.

The result is nine rows of blocks that create a dome over 5 feet high and with an 11-foot diameter.

"The real truth is, if we didn't come and help, Dorothy would be down here working by herself," said her brother-in-law Allan Byrne, who lives nearby.

By all accounts, Dorothy is the adventurer of the group.

She and Dave reconnected more than 50 years after they both graduated in 1942 from a little country school in central Illinois. During that time apart, they married and raised families. Dorothy became a registered nurse. Dave was a school superintendent and retired to Whitewater Lake.

But both of their spouses died.

"I was all ready to go into Fairhaven (nursing home) and sit and rock until I died," Dave said.

By chance, Dorothy, who lived in Aurora, Ill., spotted

Dave's name in a phone book on a visit to Lake Geneva's ice sculpture festival in 1996.

Now she has Dave building igloos.

"Since marrying her, life has been such a blast," Dave said. "She's always doing something crazy."

On a recent night, Dorothy cajoled Dave out from under his electric blanket. The two cuddled in the igloo, singing songs under a full moon.


So far, at least 50 visitors, young and old, have stopped by the igloo. All are welcome to come in and sign the guest book.

Dorothy even briefly considered hanging a print on the wall, one she has of little bears making an igloo.

"I didn't really have much time to set up housekeeping," she said.

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