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farm, working to raise cattle and hogs and chickens, and growing many crops like corn and sorghum, which is exactly what many other families were doing across the North Georgia Mountains at the time.

In the mid-1960s, the Alexanders were approached by FHA representatives to embark on a journey that Tommie immediately recognized then as a grand opportunity.

Near to them were the campgrounds at Vogel State Park, which were always full, and the FHA felt that the Alexanders were the right people to see about starting a private venture, especially given their past experience with the family and the beauty of the land that they had cultivated for 13 years prior to the campgrounds.

And so, though they had no experience with running a campground, the Alexanders jumped at the chance to usher in new industry to the mountains in the form of tourism.

"We had the lake, and we had 18 campsites and built a bathhouse," said Martha, harking back to that opening year of 1966. "And from there, we just added and added."

Over the 50 intervening years, the Alexanders have been responsible for bringing multiple generations of tourists to the mountains by offering a service-forward, beautiful campground and cabin experience for people looking to relax and enjoy nature in a safe, family-oriented environment.

This influx of tourism directly translated into visitors from all over falling in love with the area and buying land, building and investing in Union County and the surrounding North Georgia Mountains.

Since 1966, the campgrounds have grown to feature 100 private campsites for tents, pop-ups and RVs; a full stable of horses at Trackrock Stables run by Sonya Alexander, who gives riding lessons and offers trail riding and horse boarding; a dedicated area for private cabin rentals and more.

Frank Alexander enjoys an extremely active role in the campgrounds as well, taking over as innovator at Trackrock since his father, Tommie, passed away.

Not long ago, Frank reclaimed a relic from Trackrock Campground's past, an old sign in the shape of a buffalo that had gone missing but turned up years later at a barn nearby.

"Since we were so far off the main road, Tommie said, 'I don't know if we'll get any people coming in,'" said Martha of Trackrock's beginning. "Of course, we had a sign there from Vogel to come in, but he said, 'Well, people go to town and get lost. Nobody knows where we are. We need something.'"

That something, it turned out, was a small group of buffalo Tommie had heard about being in Gainesville. As soon as he'd found out they were for sale, he knew that was the ticket – he purchased the buffalo that first year as an attraction for Trackrock Campground.

He then had several signs made up in the shape of buffalo, all pointing the way to Trackrock and reading, "See Live Buffalo," which brought more and more people into the campground to witness the interesting attraction. Many even called Trackrock Campground the "Buffalo Campgrounds" in those days.

The example of the buffalo is but one demonstration of the myriad ways in which Tommie Alexander was an entrepreneur and visionary for Union County.

Tommie would go on to become a founding member of the Blairsville-Union County Chamber of Commerce, and even served as the chamber's first president, giving his all to bring tourism and business growth to Union County and the North Georgia Mountains.

In commemorating 50 years, Trackrock Campground & Cabins has already held a few special events for guests during its 2016 season, which will stretch on through October.

And though Trackrock Campground officially opened on July 4, 1966, the Alexanders saved the actual 50th Anniversary Celebration for what would be Tommie's 91st birthday, on Saturday, July 23.

Events that day included plenty of fellowship with a gathering for free tomato sandwiches and roasted corn at the beach, followed by a cornhole tournament; a scavenger hunt starting at the Office Pavilion; free hayrides, a staple loved by many guests of Trackrock Campground; a

potluck supper with over 200 guests spanning 50 years; and music late into the evening by local favorites Gnarly Fingers.

Just before those gathered for the occasion sat down for the potluck supper, everyone joined the Alexanders in singing "Happy Birthday" to Tommie, which was followed by the release of a high-flying birthday balloon in his honor.

Looking back on all of

the years that she and her family have spent at Trackrock, as stewards of the land and visionaries for the future of Union County, Martha said this of her husband, Tommie: "He loved people, and he loved the campground."

To learn more about Trackrock Campground & Cabins or to book a trail ride with Trackrock Stables, visit Trackrock.com.



Tommie and Martha Alexander in the early days of the campground



One of the many beloved attractions of Trackrock Campground & Cabins is the lake, with its warm beach and centralized swimming dock. Kids love to jump off and be thrown from the dock in hot summer weather.



Horseback lessons and trail riding are just a few of the fun, family-friendly outdoor activities available at Trackrock Campground & Cabins. Sonya Alexander runs the Trackrock Stables.



Trackrock Campground & Cabins turned 50 this year, and more than 200 guests spanning 50 years celebrated the occasion with Martha Alexander and the rest of the Alexander family on Saturday, July 23. According to Martha, her husband Tommie Alexander, who passed away in 2008, would have loved the party.



Gerald Oortman drove nearly 2,000 miles from Utah to attend the 50th Anniversary Celebration of Trackrock Campground. Oortman spoke before the big dinner that Saturday, July 23, telling stories of his many years growing up at the campground. He was just 5 years old when he and his family first stayed at Trackrock Campground, which happened to be the same year the campground opened, in 1966.