

# ITASKA BEACH

## JEWEL OF PIGEON LAKE

By Joanne Hagen  
The Pipestone Flyer

Itaska Beach is one of a dozen beaches around Pigeon Lake and a exemplary profile of neighbors working together to make the community a better place. A compact village, Itaska is located on the northeast, naturally sandy shoreline of Pigeon Lake. Since its founding in 1934, the residents of Itaska have formed a Village, created a Council, initiated a Yacht Club and together purchased land directly next to the village in order to found the environmentally protective Itaska Audubon Society.

### Itaska Beginnings

Some 75 years ago, Itaska Beach originated when Elizabeth and Robert Smith discovered and settled in the area, others eventually joining them and creating a community along the blue waters of Pigeon Lake. Developing the area into a close-knit neighborhood, Itaska today remains the smallest village on the lake, consisting of 70 residences and roughly 35 year-round permanent residents. Smith Memorial Park was later developed in honour of the Smiths.

Nearly twenty years later, the small but stalwart beach community made the decision to incorporate Itaska as a Summer Village in 1953 and elected a Council, enabling them to become self-governing and have a say in the development of the village. Since then, the Village has enhanced the area with a playground park including tennis, beach volleyball and basketball courts, and soccer, football and baseball fields and play equipment.

The Itaska Yacht Club was established in 1967, running races weekly all summer long. Kicking off with the Ice-breaker in late June or early July, every Sunday morning brings a friendly competition

between sailing cohorts. As long as weather is favorable, two races are held beginning at 10:30 a.m., with coffee served after at the home of the captain of the day.

The Itaska community firmly supports the Pigeon Lake Watershed Association and are active participants in educating the public on the cyanobacteria or blue green algae condition and in being vigilant with the removal of the recent Himalayan Balsam noxious weed springing up along the shores of Pigeon Lake.

### The Edge of the Woods

From the Cree word *ispaskweyew*, roughly translated to mean 'edge of the woods', Itaska Beach is populated with aspen, poplar and spruce trees, a rich forested environment that in the late 70's an Itaska group of 27 environmentally-friendly residents banded together and purchased fifty acres next to the village to serve as a buffer for development and protect the indigenous wildlife and insect species indigenous to the area. The nature sanctuary is also home to a number of rare plant species, with peaceful walking trails meandering throughout. The Audubon's intent is to preserve the natural environment, so all residents keep a watchful eye out for trespassing ATV's or other vehicles and evidence of grass clippings or other refuse making its way into the Audubon area.

The Society elects a board and collects dues each year, and once a year all residents are encouraged to attend the Summer Village Annual Information Meeting. Reports on budget decisions and events are shared followed by a question period. In the afternoon, true to their nature as a close-knit, cooperative community, a barbecue get-together with neighbors is held in the park. For more information on Itaska Beach, visit their website at [www.itaska.ca](http://www.itaska.ca).

# LAKEDELL AGRICULTURAL HALL HOUSE FOR ANNUAL MEETING

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The Lakedell Agricultural Hall was brimming with Pigeon Lake residents and other environmentally-minded individuals at the Pigeon Lake Watershed Association's (PLWA) annual general meeting held on Saturday, August 27. Approximately 200 concerned citizens showed to hear the ongoing developments of the Association.

The hall opened at 9:00 a.m., an hour before the general meeting, so that individuals could take in the many booths, displays and information stations set up by an environmental and stewardship groups and government agencies. Up to date information was provided by Respect our Lakes Program partner organizations at the various booths concerning lake issues such as noxious weed management and the status of the blue-green algae, or cyanobacteria, concentration in Pigeon Lake.

PLWA president, Bryan Kickham, opened the meeting with a welcome and thank you to the community for attending and taking part in the stewardship of the lake. Introducing special guests and speakers, Kickham turned the meeting over to Mr. Chris Teichreb for a water quality sampling presentation. Water quality sampling was first initiated in 1969, said Teichreb, and in 1983 a researcher at the University of Alberta began sampling Pigeon Lake waters and the lake has been sampled approximately every couple of years since. Pigeon waters are classified as slightly eutrophic, which essentially describes how green the lake is, how rich in phosphorus the surrounding soil is (supporting algal blooms) and the level of major ion concentration. The lake contains few pesticides, present but in low concentrations according to studies.

### Trew-Blue-Green Algae Expertise

Keynote speaker David Trew, Executive Director of the non-profit North Saskatchewan River Alliance, presented updated data on water quality, developing lake watershed science, lake management concepts and protection. "We are all about recommendations to protect our water supply," said Trew, who also went on to elucidate on the improvement of lake bodies since the 1950's and '60's. At this time Western Europe began studying

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