

Historic Charm With Modern Luxury

An Interview with Stephanie and Lisa Karvellas, Co-Owners,
Cedar Lakes Estate



Stephanie Karvellas Bayton and Lisa Karvellas

EDITORS' NOTE Stephanie Karvellas Bayton attended Clemson University, where she studied management and learned the elements of successful event planning. After college, she moved to New York City and worked for one of Manhattan's top wedding planners. Her sharp attention to detail and talent for resolving issues inspired her to bring these skills to her own ventures.

Lisa Karvellas graduated summa cum laude from Vanderbilt University and was valedictorian of the French Culinary Institute in Manhattan. Her time in the city allowed her to work with some of the world's finest chefs. Seeking to learn more, she moved to Italy where she worked in Tuscan and Sicilian kitchens before returning home as the first chef of Cedar Lakes.

PROPERTY BRIEF Located in Port Jervis, New York, Cedar Lakes Estate (cedarlakesestate.com) occupies the grounds of a 1930s-era summer camp in the heart of the Hudson Valley. The enchanting retreat operates as a picturesque wedding venue for three seasons each year and transforms into a winter wonderland resort during the colder months. Spanning 500 acres, Cedar Lakes Estate features 16 luxury cottages, 14 nostalgic cabins, and 6 cozy suites, blending historical charm with contemporary luxury.

Will you highlight the history of Cedar Lakes Estate and provide an overview of the property?

Stephanie: The property dates back to 1929, when it was developed as Camp Minisink, a place for inner-city youth to enjoy summers outside of

the city. This incredible Harlem-based camp ran for over 30 years and made a tremendous impact on generations of campers. Many of them still come up every year for reunions, some well into their 90s. Years after Minisink closed, our parents, Steve and Lisa, purchased the desolate summer camp in 1986; the weeds were overgrown and the cabins were in disrepair. They committed to restoring the grounds and cabins, and this place became a true life-long labor of love for them. In the early 90s, they opened Team USA Gymnastics and Soccer Camp, where they hosted Olympic athletes for nearly 15 years.

Lisa: My sisters and I cherished our time spent here as children; our most special memories were filled with White Christmases, fresh mountain air, and barefoot summer days by the lake. This nostalgia has always drawn us back and was enough to inspire us to build a business right here at our childhood home. In 2012, we made the decision to transform our family's treasured property into a private estate that we would share with visitors. We operate as a wedding venue three seasons out of the year, and a winter wonderland boutique hotel the fourth. With luxury cottages, nostalgic cabins, and houses sprawled across 500 acres, the estate combines historic charm with modern luxury. We are in the business of creating unforgettable experiences for our guests.

How do you define Cedar Lakes Estate's mission and purpose?

Stephanie: Cedar Lakes Estate's mission is deeply rooted in our commitment to preserving the rich history and natural beauty of our family property while providing an unparalleled hospitality experience for our guests. We strive to create a sanctuary where individuals can reconnect with nature, celebrate life's milestones, and find tranquility amidst the



A lakeside wedding at Cedar Lakes Estate (above); an antique truck adds charm to a beautiful vista (top)

hustle and bustle of everyday life. Our purpose extends beyond offering luxurious accommodations and event spaces; it is about fostering a sense of community, creating lasting memories, and curating experiences that resonate with the heart and soul of each guest.

Lisa: When it comes to our purpose, the foundational commitment is to our people. We know that delivering exceptional hospitality to guests begins by extending that same warmth to our team. Placing our people first fosters a familial community, instilling a sense of ownership and pride in the company. This ethos allows staff to greet guests as if they are entering their own homes.

What have been the keys to the growth of Cedar Lakes Estate?

Stephanie: Our growth and success have undoubtedly been fueled by our loving dedication to our staff, our unrelenting commitment to excellence, and our prioritization of genuine hospitality. But a more tangible key to our growth has been our ability to truly listen to our clients, allowing them to guide our business. We always knew the importance of maintaining the timeless charm of our family property while also modernizing our amenities, but it was our guests who helped us decide what updates were necessary and when.

How do each of you focus your efforts leading Cedar Lakes Estate?

Lisa: Stephanie's focus at Cedar Lakes Estate lies in her expertise in sales, event planning, and operations, which were all honed through her experience with one of Manhattan's top wedding planners. She brings a keen eye for detail and a passion for creating seamless, unforgettable events. From weddings to corporate retreats, Stephanie ensures that every event at Cedar Lakes Estate is executed with precision and elegance. Her ability to coordinate logistics, manage teams, and curate bespoke experiences allows our guests to relax and fully immerse themselves in the beauty and tranquility of our property.

Stephanie: Lisa, with her extensive culinary background, leads our culinary and hospitality programs. A valedictorian of the French Culinary Institute and a seasoned chef with experience in some of the world's finest kitchens, Lisa infuses our dining experiences with creativity and excellence. She also oversees the creative direction of the company, spearheading all design projects and new construction. Lisa's eye for aesthetics and dedication to providing exceptional dining experiences complements my attention to detail and event expertise, creating a dynamic yin and yang leadership style.



Cedar Lakes Estate indoor event venue



How do you balance your work-life relationship working in a family business?

Lisa: Balancing our work-life relationship within a family business like Cedar Lakes Estate is a journey that blends our personal bond with our professional aspirations. We have cultivated a deep understanding and respect for each other's strengths – and weaknesses – over the years, which allows us to effectively collaborate and make informed decisions. Communication is key; we prioritize open dialogue to ensure that both our personal and professional goals are aligned, fostering a supportive environment where we can thrive both individually and as co-owners. This harmony extends beyond our roles at Cedar Lakes Estate; we make time for family moments and personal interests as well, which nurtures our connection outside of work to maintain a healthy balance.

What are your priorities for Cedar Lakes Estate as you look to the future?

Stephanie: We always say that our biggest goal is for every employee to consider their time at Cedar Lakes Estate as the best job they have ever or will ever have. This year, we were honored as one of Inc. Magazine's Best Places to Work, which makes us feel that we are on the path to achieving that goal. Not coincidentally, we also won Travel and Leisure's World's Best Award for #1 Best Hotel in New York, #5 in the USA, and #60 in the world this year. There is no doubt in our minds that those two go hand-in-hand. So, as we look to the future, we will continue to prioritize our people above all else, because we know it trickles down to the guest experience more powerfully than anything else.

Another priority is preserving the natural beauty of our property while introducing practices that minimize our environmental footprint. Sustainability is not just a trend but a core value that guides our decisions – from sourcing local ingredients for our food to implementing energy-efficient technologies across our facilities. Right now, we run 30 percent of our electricity off of our solar system. We plan to be 100 percent solar-powered by 2027. By prioritizing sustainability, we aim to create a lasting impact that benefits our guests, our community, and the Hudson Valley region as a whole.

And finally, we will forever prioritize our commitment to excellence. We know that our unwavering quest for perfection will always lead us in the right direction and drive us forward in everything that we do. ●



One of the accommodations at Cedar Lakes Estate (above); a culinary creation by Lisa Karvellas (center)