

AN OFFICE WITH A LAKE

Transforming a vacation home into a telecommuting paradise



Dave Reski was a well-seasoned road warrior. Serving clients across the upper Midwest, the Sioux-Falls-based sales agent regularly crossed lonely expanses of South Dakota, Minnesota, and North Dakota.

“Sometimes I’d drive four and a half hours for a meeting that took fifteen minutes,” Reski said.

Now, he meets with most clients at a single location—the end of his dock overlooking the clear waters of Boot Lake in northern Minnesota. How he went from high plains drifting to lakeside telecommuting is part of a larger story that’s changing the way Americans do business and where they choose to live. Here in Minnesota, Reski joins the growing ranks of distance workers seeking their own slice of paradise along a lakeshore.

Well before the pandemic, Reski’s employer wanted him to relocate closer to their home office in St. Paul and his clients in Greater Minnesota. Dave’s wife, Treasure, was not thrilled about trading in her hometown for the Twin Cities metro. But she did concede that Minnesota offered something hard to come by in South Dakota—lakes.

“Treasure’s biggest condition was a house on a shoreline with a sandy beach,” Reski said. “And it had to be a flat lot because she’s thinking ahead to retirement and the grandchildren we’ll eventually have.”

Just as they were readying their South Dakota home for sale, COVID-19 rippled across the country, shutting down offices and public spaces. For Reski, the looming question over the move became internet connectivity. Did the northern Minnesota

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communities they were considering have the bandwidth to support his job? Could he really function as a full-time telecommuter?

For the answer to that and many other questions, he turned to T.J. Simon, founding partner of Wolff and Simon Real Estate in Park Rapids. Simon, who has spent most of his life in northern Minnesota, is intimately familiar with the area's countless lakes and the communities surrounding them.

"Dave needed a high-speed connection up and running from day one," Simon noted. "We're seeing a lot more clients with the same needs. The question used to be, 'can I get access—at all?' Now, for people planning to telecommute, it's all about access and speed. The sale pivots around it. So, the transition time to achieve that has to be faster now, too."

Striking the right balance between technology and lakeshore aesthetics is a tall order, but Simon helped the Reskis quickly narrow their choices.

"T.J. was honest and upfront about properties to avoid. He didn't want to waste our time. A place might look good in the photos, but he knew about its problems. He educated us about things we just didn't have a clue about coming from Sioux Falls, like septic systems, and powering a home on propane electric. He pointed out a lot of stuff and definitely earned his commission."

Eventually, Dave and Treasure found that coveted home on a flat lot with a sandy beach along the shores of Boot Lake, a secluded spot known for its walleye fishing about 18 miles northwest of Park Rapids, and 216 miles from St. Paul. With stunning lake views, four-bedrooms, vaulted beam ceilings, weathered oak flooring, and two fireplaces, the spacious home will make even the coldest winters cozy but not confining. Well situated on an acre and a half with 159 feet of

lakeshore, the home has a sunroom, generous patio, and of course the dock where Reski has been doing business since they moved in on July 31st.

As for fast internet, Reski enjoys taking advantage of the blazing speed provided by the newly installed fiberoptic connection.

"My office is in my hand these days," he said, referring to his smartphone. "So, I don't really need a home office, per say. I used to have bookshelves stacked with catalogs. But my customers don't want them anymore. Everything is digital and online. This is the way it's going for a lot of us. There's no getting away from it now."

When Reski isn't making dockside business deals, he's out on the water in his new boat trying his luck at those elusive walleyes and enjoying the cool lake breezes. This new lifestyle, he says, sure beats racking up highway miles en route to the next client meeting.

“These days, as long as you can connect to your job, you can live anywhere you want.”

"There are worse places to live than northern Minnesota," Reski said. "Winters are long, but there's a lot of fun stuff to do in the winter, too. Whether it's raining or snowing, you just need to get a different set of toys out. These days, as long as you can connect to your job, you can live anywhere you want."